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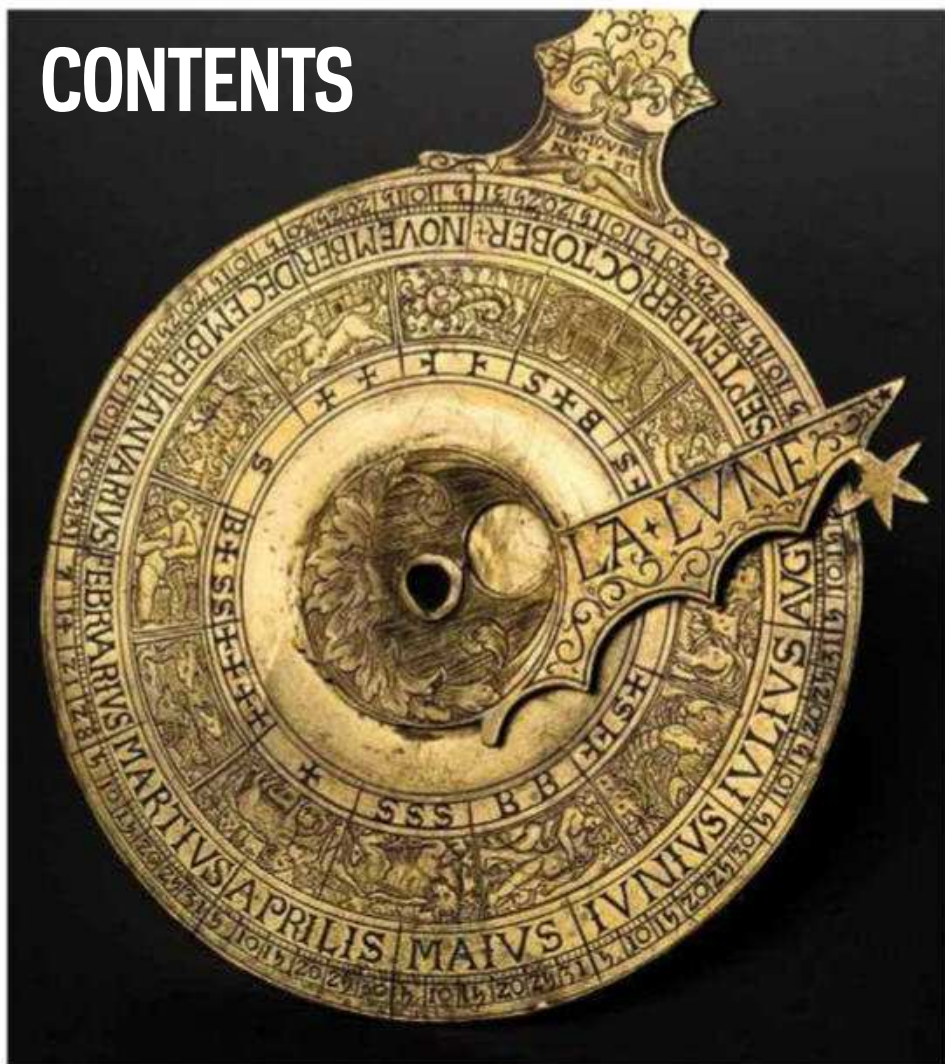
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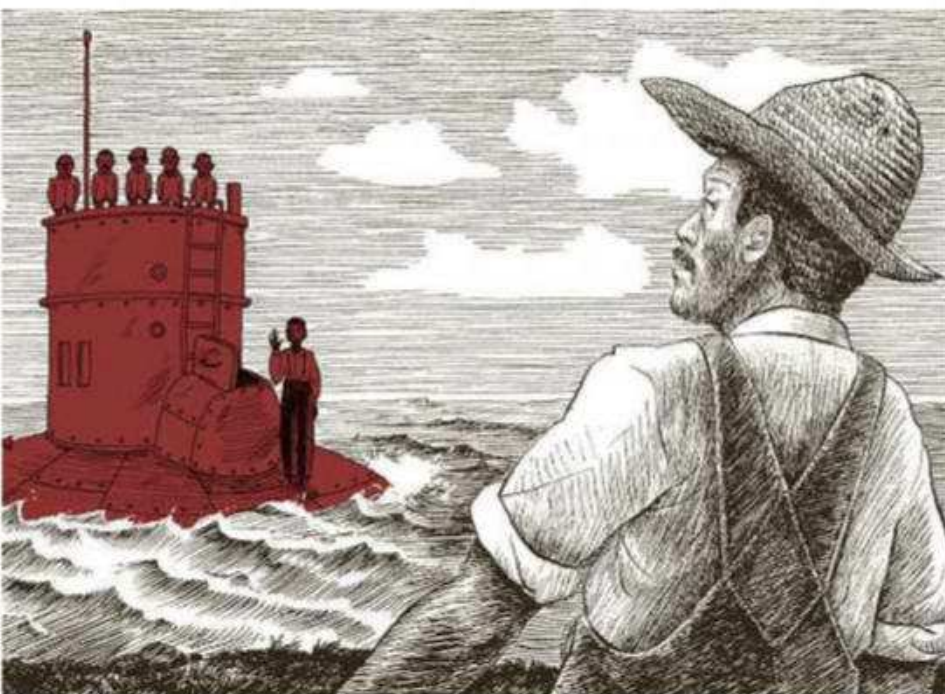
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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

CAT KILLERS AND ROBIN'S LAW

It seems that the notorious 'Croydon Cat Killer' (FT341:4) has now been consigned to the realm of urban legend, joining such folk devils and bogeymen as Spring-heeled Jack, the Mohawks, and Jack the Ripper (FT310:30-35, 40-41). The putative moggy murderer was believed to have killed, mutilated and dismembered hundreds of cats across south London, starting in Croydon in 2014. The attacks quickly spread out across the whole Greater London area and beyond, with reports of similar (copycat?) killing sprees from Guildford, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Northampton, and even Caernarfon in North Wales; to reflect this growing geographical range, the Croydon Cat Killer became the 'M25 Cat Killer' or 'UK Cat Killer'.

The Metropolitan Police made a shock announcement on 20 September: its three-year investigation was being closed down, "its final conclusion [being] that there is no evidence of human involvement. All of the cases of cat mutilation will be recorded as 'no crime'" (<http://news.met.police.uk/news/scavenging-by-wildlife-established-as-likely-cause-of-reported-cat-mutilations-323426>). It was stated that the 2016 post-mortems of 25 mutilated cats revealed that the cause of death was blunt force trauma, probably from vehicle collisions. Any mutilation took place after death, the likeliest suspects being scavenging urban foxes. The Croydon Cat Killer had never existed.

Are we looking, then, not at a series of cruel acts committed by a budding serial killer, but an old-fashioned moral panic, born out of fear, revulsion and disavowal, given form by sensational media headlines and sustained by our tendency to create monsters? Not everyone buys such a sceptical approach or agrees with the Metropolitan Police's verdict. There have been plenty of dissenting, angry voices, many pointing to the inconsistencies in the Met's own statements over the past three years and a number of cases that appear to point conclusively to some sort of human involvement. As we go to press, a petition urging the Met to reopen the investigation into the Cat Killer has gained over 25,000 signatures.

Some sloppy reporting of the Met's

statement in the press could also lead to fox-flaps replacing cat-killer-flaps: if crafty Reynard is believed to have been killing the capital's kitties, we might see another of the periodic panics around urban foxes (FT73:35-37, 262:02, 301:39, 330:02). Some have even suggested that foxy has been set up as a fall guy to cover Plod's incompetence in catching the real culprit.

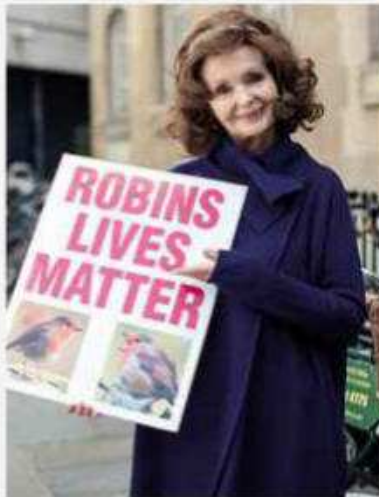
All we can offer by way of anecdotal evidence here at Fortean Towers is that our own urban foxes are utterly brazen but have never shown the slightest interest in the resident cats (the feeling seems to

be mutual). However, on a nightly basis, the vulpine carousers leave their toys (presumably stolen) in the garden. Often, various stray limbs are found; last week, a cuddly monkey's head turned up, only to vanish again the following night; two days later, the dismembered simian's arms were left in its place. It seems that the foxes' habit of removing body parts doesn't just apply to dead cats.

Finally, a tip of the hat to Sophie Wilder, who informed us, via Twitter, of a particularly impressive feat of foxy infamy: "A friend of mine in London left his front door open while gardening. A fox went into the house, zoomed upstairs and crapped in his bed."

ROBIN LIVES MATTER

While we're on the subject of wildlife, we'd like to draw attention to the one-woman campaign being staged by the extremely glamorous Margaret Allen, who we recently encountered taking her pro-robin protest to the streets of central London. As she points out: "Birds bring us both joy and tranquility. They help us mark the seasons. All our garden birds should have the right to life." Margaret's argument is that by making cat owners responsible for their pets, 'Robin's Law' will "provide much needed protection for our precious garden birds, whose numbers are declining, and for millions of vulnerable cats" who end up being poisoned, missing or "horribly mutilated" (see above).



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23 October	thecapitolhorsham.com	£
Newbury Corn Exchange	0845 5218 218	£
24 October	cornexchange.co.uk	£
Wythenshawe Forum	0161 935 4000	£
25 October	bit.ly/2P56MDn	£
Blackpool Pleasure Beach	0871 222 1234	£
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28 October	riccall.co.uk/events	£
Ulverston Coronation Hall	01229 587 140	£
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4 November	0330 100 6648	£
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Ipswich Regent	01473 433 100	£
7 November	bit.ly/2nDFCHI	£
Grays The Civic Hall	08444 993 666	£
8 November	bit.ly/2P7SCBw	£
Corby, The Core at the Cube	01536 470 470	£
9 November	thecorecorby.com	£
Northwich Memorial Court	01606 261 100	£
10 November	bit.ly/2nF55Qp	£
Butlins Minehead WWE WEEKEND		£
11 November	0330 100 6648	£
butlins.com		£
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12 November	princesspavilion.co.uk	£
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Woking New Victoria Theatre	08448 717 645	£
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Swindon Wyvern	01793 524 481	£
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Poole Lighthouse	01202 280 000	£
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26 January	plymouthpavilions.com	£

£ = tickets also available to purchase from
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circusofhorrors.co.uk

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WARNING: The Circus of Horrors contains some nudity and language of an adult nature, it is not suitable for children, sissies or chavs. This show contains nuts! The dangerous nature of our performances means individual acts may sometimes change.

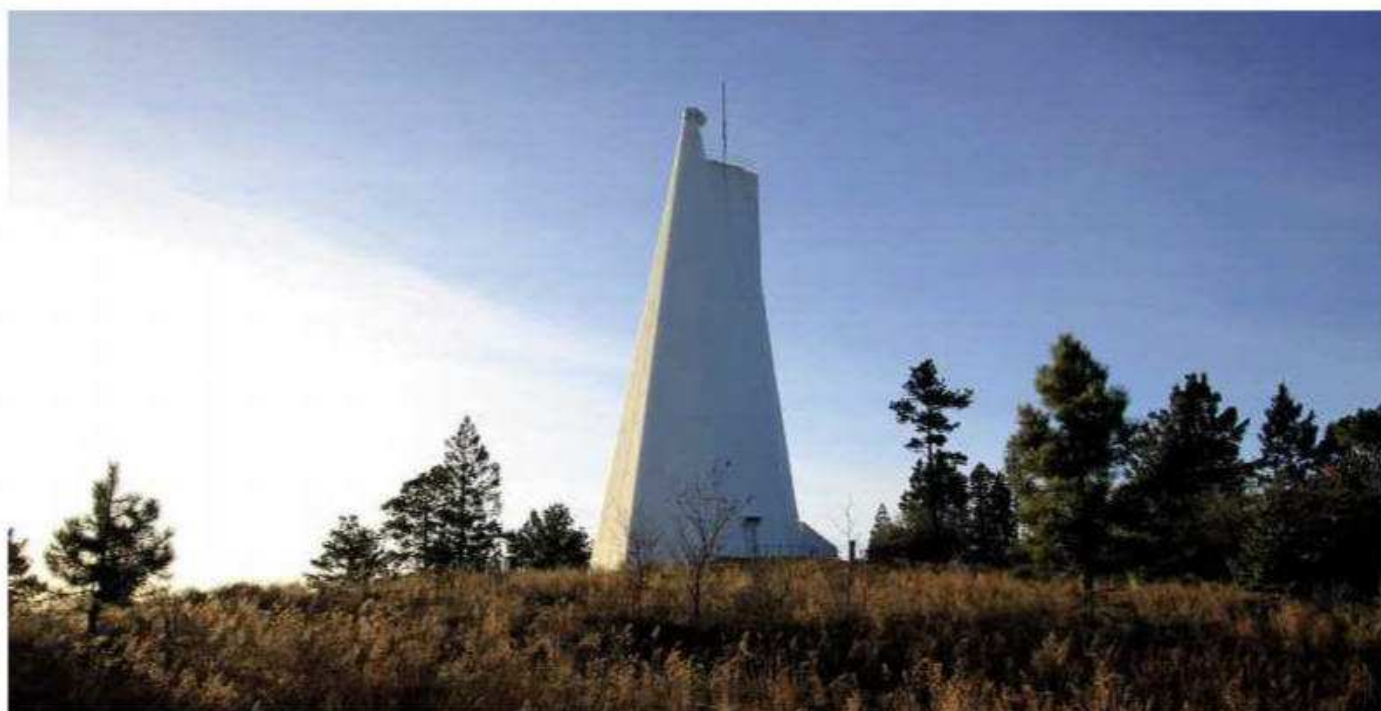


A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

THE SUNSPOT SHUTDOWN

Speculation runs wild as a US Solar Observatory is closed and evacuated



ABOVE: One of the towers of the Sunspot Solar Observatory in the Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico.

On 7 September 2018 the Sunspot Solar Observatory in New Mexico, home to one of the largest active solar telescopes in the world, was shut down and all personnel evacuated. The FBI was on the scene almost immediately; employees and the public were indefinitely banned from the premises, and the observatory's website read: "Temporarily closed". The local post office was also shut down without explanation. No one seemed to know what was happening, not even Benny House, Otero County Sheriff, who sent his deputies onto the scene only to find absolutely no specific threat. "The FBI is refusing to tell us what's going on," said Sheriff House. "We've got people up there [at Sunspot] that requested us to standby while they evacuate it. Nobody would really elaborate on any of the circumstances as to why. The FBI were up there. There was a Blackhawk helicopter, a bunch

of people around antennas and work crews on towers, but nobody would tell us anything."

Nestled in the Lincoln National Forest at an altitude of 2,800m (9,200ft), the observatory's remote wilderness location is exactly the sort of place where strange stories take root. Was it a government conspiracy to cover up contact with aliens? Or some foreign power attempting to use the observatory's antennae to spy on nearby White Sands Missile Range? Or had the observatory captured an image of a secret machine or craft – or opened a portal into another world? Maria Hill, of Salem, Indiana, believed she had discovered the reason for the lockdown, posting photos on Facebook she claimed showed a large fleet of UFOs passing in front of the Sun and "a green circular door-like object... at the centre of the vortex/ wormhole and a serpent snake at the top right above it, by a

circular disc." Conspiracies were further fuelled by the incident's alignment with a "moderate" geomagnetic storm, which sent charged solar particles streaming towards Earth's atmosphere in the previous days. Some noted the fact that the observatory is only around 200km (124 miles) from Roswell.

The observatory was originally built by the Army in 1947 when it realised the Sun could interfere with radio communications. The National Science Foundation ran the facility from the 1960s until this year, when operation was transferred to the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA), and New Mexico State University. AURA did little to dispel the wild rumours flitting across the Internet. Spokesperson Shari Lifson told the media that there was a "security issue", but was unable to give any more details. A week after the shutdown, Sunspot's website failed to shed

any light with this statement: "On Thursday September 6th, AURA made the decision to temporarily close Sunspot. The Sunspot Solar Observatory continues to work closely with AURA in order to allow for us to reopen as soon as possible. With the excitement this closure has generated, we hope you will come and visit us when we do reopen, and see for yourself the services we provide for science and public outreach in heliophysics."

Despite such reassuring words, as the lockdown entered its second week, people began to wonder whether the observatory would ever open again. Then, on 19 September, a Reuters report finally shed some light (of sorts) on events: federal court documents revealed that the FBI was investigating the apparent use of Sunspot's Wi-Fi to download and distribute child pornography. The prime suspect appeared to be an unnamed janitor whose laptop had been connected to the facility's wireless network. One witness reported that the janitor's behaviour became increasingly erratic after his laptop was seized, with the "frantic" man claiming that "someone had been entering the Observatory at night" to steal Wi-Fi and "feverishly" warning investigators of a "serial killer in the area" who might "enter the facility and execute someone".

As we go to press, Sunspot has reopened, and seems to be making light of the whole strange affair on its social media channels. Meanwhile, the mysterious janitor has neither been arrested nor charged and the case is said to be "under investigation". *cnet.com*, 12 Sept; *dailymail.co.uk*, *independent.co.uk/news*, 13 Sept; *sciencealert.com*, 14 Sept; *space.com*, *Vice News*, 20 Sept; *D.Express*, 21 Sept 2018.



CLASSICAL CORNER

Fishy stories from the ancient world

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ILLNESS OR DELUSION?

The medical mystery of Morgellons

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SCOTTISH SAUCERY

UFOs over Donald Trump's golf course?

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THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The far-right are joining hands across the ocean, says **NOEL ROONEY**; and that's not the only thing they're doing with their hands according to some excitable observers...

HAND SIGNALS

It's beginning to feel as if the alt-right is establishing a kind of international aristocracy; a head-patting, back-rubbing, selfie-taking club of shared interests and ambitions. Ambitions being an operative term: with the USA lurching along under the erratic leadership of the Donald, and Europe's parliaments increasingly populated by factions and parties self-describing as populist, but led and staffed by people we all used to think of as fascists, it does seem like a good time to be a strident nationalist – so why not a strident internationalist supporting nationalism everywhere?

A prime example of this air-mile version of the far right is the wonderfully monickered Brittany Pettibone. Ms Pettibone, daughter of the equally well-handled Theodore (once a gubernatorial candidate in the state of Kansas for the Reform Party, the plaything of eccentric millionaire and wannabe president H Ross Perot), first came to public attention by endorsing the Trump campaign, while busily promoting Pizzagate, white genocide and other theories of the kook right. Brittany is into collaboration: she and her sister wrote and published a series of novels under the title *Hatred Day* (what is it with right-wingers and fiction with 'day' in the title?); then she ran a series of podcasts with Tara McCarthy (a British ethno-nationalist who makes Attila the Hun look like a social justice warrior).

And now she's stepping out with Martin Sellner, the Austrian far-right's current media darling. Sellner is perhaps best known for his (thankfully bungled) attempt to invent a pan-European navy and use it to sink boats carrying refugees; he is also a leading figure in the Generation Identity movement, a slick, sick, tech-savvy version of neo-Nazism with branches (or burning torches) all over Europe. The prospect of dynastic alliances between the outer reaches of acceptable on either side of the pond is not edifying: even



the *Sun* is worried. More to the point, this brand of politics relies on certain strands of conspiracy theory that it employs as both manifesto and shibboleth; another point of entry to the mainstream for material that was once marginalised and ridiculed, and now gets an airing not just in

the tabloids, but on national television and even in institutions of government. The fact that it's peddled by, among others, a person often referred to as the 'alt-right Barbie' doesn't make it any more attractive.

And then there are the hand signals. Observers of Trump and his cronies, and the wider cavalcade of right-wing worthies, have noticed a particular 'gang sign' becoming more common. Join the tips of your index finger and thumb, and extend the other three fingers: you are now, according to some, expressing the idea of white power; the extended digits form a crude letter W, and the finger and thumb the loop of the letter P, fully formed when you include the wrist. This exercise in semiology is an amusing mirror of the kind of thing regularly posted on religious right media, 'proving' that various pop stars and other celebrities are in league with Satan. More so when one considers that the identical hand sign is considered to be a reference to the Number of the Beast by the fervent Satan-spotters. If you are reading this underwater, or were born before 2016, you may be forgiven for thinking this is merely the gesture for 'OK' or 'are you OK?' used by scuba divers and, well, people; but hey, this is a post-factual world where things mean what we want (or fear) them to mean.

Less amusing is the thought that social media platforms are now home to a new brand of extreme nationalism, aimed at a younger audience for whom the history of fascism is irrelevant. In a digital world where yesterday is old, and Instagram is evidence, those crude manual exhibitions of approbation might just catch on.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

POLICE BREAK UP REINDEER PROTEST

<i> 22 Aug 2013.

Ant flies in to jungle after battling his drug demons

Metro, 13 Nov 2017.

RESTAURANTS HELPING TO TACKLE HUNGER

Bristol Post, 14 Feb 2018.

Trains to arrive in suburb after 20-year delay

Irish Times, 20 Aug 2018.

'BISEXUAL' BEETLES DON'T SWING BOTH WAYS... THEY'RE JUST INEPT

D.Telegraph, 11 May 2018.

Leopards are spotted

Hull Daily Mail, 15 Sept 2018.



SIDELINES...

FISH RAIN

On the afternoon of 13 July 2018, fish – 4in to 6in (10-15cm) long – came down with monsoon rain around the tomb of Sufi Saint Sheikh Salim Chishti at Buland Darwaza in the ancient Indian city of Fatehpur Sikri (capital of the Mughal empire from 1571 to 1585). Someone asserted that the fish had been lifted from “nearby ponds”. Children took some of the fish home. *thefortean.com*, 14 July 2018.

BOOM BOOM!

Crystal Methvin [sic], 40, was facing drug charges after police in St Augustine, Florida, caught her – and her friend Douglas Nickerson – in possession of crystal meth in a parking lot on 26 May. *Metro*, *D.Star*, 1 June 2018.

CONSENSUAL

Daniel Raymond Webb-Jackson, 31, was jailed for 10 months for having sex with a horse. He told a court in New South Wales that the two-year-old filly had given consent by smelling his crotch and winking at him. *rt.com*, 18 July 2018.

GREEN TERRORISTS

In a bid to become more eco-friendly, the Islamist terror group Al Shabaab, East Africa’s answer to Daesh, have banned single-use plastic bags and the logging of native trees. The green initiative was announced by Mohamed Abu Abdalla, the group’s governor of southern Somalia’s Shabelle region. (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, 5 July 2018.

GEMS FROM ABOVE

After weeks of spewing ash and lava, Hawaii’s Kilauea volcano was shooting green crystals, known as olivines, into the air. They were discovered by residents of Hawaii’s Big Island. (*Queensland*) *Courier-Mail*, 15 June 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

CULTS AND CURES | Miracle waters, bizarre rituals and a failed attempt at resurrection



FACEBOOK / NATADRADAVE TESTIMONIES

ABOVE: The remote spring at Natahradave in eastern Fiji and a welcome sign proclaiming the miraculous power of its waters.

In early 2018, hundreds visited the “miracle waters” of a remote spring in eastern Fiji’s Tailevu province. For Menausi Druguvale the magic began two years earlier when he was afflicted with conjunctivitis and tramped into the mountains seeking a rumoured spring his father told him could cure his eyes. “When I went to the main source after Cyclone Winston, I showered in the water, and soon my eyes cleared, so I started to tell people in the village,” he said. “A lot of people were injured after the cyclone. Then more and more people heard, around Fiji and around the world.”

God bestowing a blessing on the Fijian people in the form of the spring makes sense to believers, especially as a kindness after Cyclone Winston, which killed 44 people and cost an estimated US\$1.4bn. Within months, the obscure, impoverished town of Natahradave, home to 27 families, became a site of global interest. Thousands made the two-hour journey from the capital Suva to join lines of the sick and injured stretching for miles along the unpaved road through humid jungle. The spring water flows down from the western division mountain range. It tastes sweet and nutty, with an ochre tinge after heavy rains. Locals say the water is only effective as it runs through a series of small streams, and it loses its healing ability when it joins with the tributaries that flow into the

Rewa river, the widest in Fiji.

With other village volunteers, Druguvale helps some of the thousands who visit every day and night to navigate the slippery path to the stream, where two concrete pipes spurt water into a shallow pool for bathing. A series of PVC channels enable people to collect bottles of water, which are shipped around the world. “In one month, maybe 50,000 people visit,” says Druguvale. “Some people will come in a wheelchair, some people come by ambulance. I massage the mud into people’s skin after they have showered and drunk the water. It works, every single time.” Muscle aches and skin conditions are the most common illnesses people present with, though others with cancer, mental disorders, burns, strokes, blindness and paralysis have all attested to being cured by the spring. Visitors are buoyed

by thousands of ardent online testimonies, and videos of paraplegics standing up from their wheelchairs.

Because of the huge numbers descending on the deprived region, the Fijian government has built concrete pathways, toilet facilities and a cellphone tower, and upgraded roads. Locals who assist visitors refuse to take money, believing the water will lose its miracle properties if they do, but they accept food donations and say the spring has been a “blessing” as they have been rewarded with better infrastructure, repaired houses, and sustained, improved health.

Asked how the miracle water works, Druguvale said: “It is God, and maybe it is minerals too, and maybe the mud. Me and my father don’t know why. But we know for a long time, it has been special. Would you like a drink?” *Guardian*, 15 Feb 2018.



ABOVE: The healing spring has been attracting thousands of visitors every month.

FACEBOOK / NATADRADAVE TESTIMONIES



• A South Korean cult leader has been arrested after abandoning 400 of her followers in Fiji. Grace Road Church founder Shin Ok-ju and three other senior members of the group were arrested at Incheon International Airport on 29 July. Shin is accused of confiscating the passports of 400 of her followers and stranding them in Fiji, as well as overseeing a tyrannical regime in which members were forced to labour on rice farms and inflict savage beatings on one another. As leader of Grace Road Church, Shin preaches an apocalyptic brand of Christianity declared heretical by major Korean church denominations.

In 2014 Shin was sued for \$6 million by a man from Brooklyn whom she had tried to cure of schizophrenia through prayer. In a bizarre ritual, he was tied with duct tape so tightly that one of his legs had to be amputated. His general

condition reportedly worsened to the point where he had to live in a nursing home. Also in 2014, Shin began prophesying a disastrous famine, encouraging her devotees to found a new colony on far-flung Fiji, which she said would offer them the best chance of survival. Many were encouraged to abandon their studies and jobs, while others were so captivated



by the pastor that they willingly divorced and left their families behind.

Hundreds travelled 5,000 miles (8,000km) to a 83-acre (34ha) compound on the South Pacific island, where they were “ordered to live together... under the supervision of ‘guardians’ handpicked by the pastor”, according to the *Korea Times*. These guardians forced members to take part in a ritual called “threshing ground”, in which they were told they had to beat each other or face God’s punishment. A former member of the cult told a TV interviewer

LEFT: Grace Road Church is accused of forcing members to work on its rice farms. BELOW: Leader Shin Ok-ju.

that one young member “had to hit his father more than 100 times”. Another follower sustained serious brain damage from injuries inflicted during one of the bloody ordeals. Eventually, around five of the worshippers managed to escape the compound and contacted South Korean authorities about what was happening to the others – who were still stranded in Fiji at the time of the reports. *The Week*, 1 Aug; *Odditycentral.com*, 6 Aug 2018.

• Getayawkal Ayele was arrested in Ethiopia after failing to bring a dead man back to life. Residents in the small western town of Galilee, in the Oromia region, said Getayawkal, a health worker, first went to the bereaved family of Belay Biftu and told them the story of Lazarus being brought back to life by Jesus. They appear to have agreed to dig up their deceased relative. The aspiring prophet then tried to revive the corpse in the graveyard by lying on it and repeatedly yelling “Belay, wake up!” The incident was filmed and went viral on social media. After the failed resurrection, several members of the family fainted on the spot while others became angry and started beating Getayawkal – at which point police arrived and arrested him, since abusing dead bodies is a crime under Ethiopian law. *BBC News*, 21 July; <i>23 July 2018.



ABOVE: Getayawkal Ayele lay on top of the deceased Belay Biftu and yelled at him to wake up. Ayele was subsequently arrested.

SIDELINES...

SOUTH'S BIGGEST

Brazilian Rodrigo Koxa surfed an 80ft (24m) wave off Nazare, Portugal, last November. On 9 May 2018, the southern hemisphere’s largest wave – 78.1ft (23.8m) high – was recorded by a buoy during a storm near Campbell Island, some 430 miles (700km) south of New Zealand. It broke the previous record of 72ft (22m) recorded in 2012. The world record wave is a 100ft (30m) tsunami in Alaska in 1958. *Sun*, 1 May; *D.Telegraph*, 12 May 2018.

PHALLIC MAGIC

In April, Veeraphol Phongsai, 49, of Yasothon city in Thailand, led a group of people to make offerings and pray for lucky lottery numbers in front of a 2ft (60cm) anthill on his farm, shaped like a Shiva lingam. The man claimed he had won the lottery 15 consecutive times. The Thai lottery runs twice monthly and sees many seek inspiration from all kind of objects, including airport crashes and dead pig foetuses. *khaosodenglish.com*, Thailand, 30 April 2018.

DANGEROUS DIET

A man suffering abdominal pain had 40 objects removed from his stomach including nail clippers, glass, scissors, steel fragments and seven stones. Doctors in Bayamo, Cuba, saved the life of Leosbani Pino Lopez, 32, in a two-hour operation. He had swallowed the haul over four months. *Sunday People*, 1 April 2018.

SMUGGLER'S SURPRISE

An Irishman was arrested at Heathrow airport after two rare vulture eggs hidden in a body belt hatched in transit. The 56-year-old arrived in London on a flight from South Africa and, when searched, officers found 19 eggs from various birds of prey as well as the newly hatched chicks. The eggs and chicks were taken to a specialist facility. *Irish Independent*, 30 June 2018.

LIVING UP TO ITS NAME

A fire engine in Camp Jackson, Illinois, caught fire inside the fire station on a Sunday afternoon. Crews were able to start it up and pull it outside away from the other equipment. The cause was believed to be electrical. *Belleville (S. Illinois) News Democrat*, 27 May 2018.



SIDELINES...

SELF-REGULATION

A fire in Lafayette Street, Hackettstown, New Jersey, was caused by a fish tank motor igniting and spreading to a nearby wall. The heat caused the fish tank to crack and when firefighters arrived, they found that the leaking water had put out the fire. *nj.com*, 18 May 2018.

OMINOUS HOWL

The family of Major General Corran Purdon, who died on 27 June 2018, is reputed to have its own banshee that howls when one of them is going to die. Purdon (born in Co. Cork) remembered that on receiving reports that the banshee had been heard, telegrams were sent to everyone in the family to find out if they were all right. *D.Telegraph*, 16 July 2018.

EXTINCT TREE REVIVED

In 2005, botanical researcher Elaine Solowey found some 2,000-year-old date palm seeds in a drawer at Israel's Bar-Ilan University. They had been discovered during an excavation of Herod the Great's palace in the 1960s. The Judean date palm, once a staple crop, has been extinct since around AD 500. Solowey planted one and it produced a healthy sapling. *Treehugger.com*, 31 Oct 2016.

NOT CONTAGIOUS

In a survey of 2,000 people, 16 per cent – almost one in six – thought hay fever could be passed from person to person like the common cold. And more than a third (36 per cent) believed pollen count was measured by a society of beekeepers. *D.Telegraph*, 4 May 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

SUMMER OF SERPENTS | Heatwave sees snakes breaking out all over...



RSPCA

- A woman got the “fright of her life” when she woke to find she was sharing her bed with a 3ft (90cm) long royal python. The snake, thought to be an escaped pet, had curled up next to her as she slept in her flat in Kensington, west London, on 23 July. She rushed out and called the RSPCA, but the snake slithered away before they arrived. It was finally captured in the flat the following day as it made its way down a corridor. Royal pythons originate in West Africa. They grow up to 150cm (4ft 9in), can live more than 20 years in captivity, and require a diet of defrosted mice and rats. Typically ‘docile’ in nature, they curl into a ball when threatened. Snakes are more likely to escape in summer as they have more energy during hot weather. *BBC News*, 28 July 2018.

- On 29 July, an 8ft (2.4m) python was discovered in a blind man's bathroom in Exeter after slithering through a neighbour's plumbing system and up a lavatory. Stuart Saunders, 60, said: “I was in my reclining chair listening to music when I heard crash, crash – and things began falling in the bathroom. I thought the wind from the window must have blown them over. A toothbrush and glass, a

The snake had curled up next to her as she slept in her London flat

bottle of bleach and shampoo had all fallen down. When I picked them up, I noticed this thing on the floor, like insulation had come up.” He tried to lift what he thought was a foam insulation pipe. When he failed to shift it, he rang his support worker for help. The latter arrived and told him the “pipe” was an escaped snake. It was passed into the care of Exeter Exotics, a local pet shop. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 31 July 2018.



LEFT: The Kensington royal python.

BELOW: This boa constrictor was filmed eating a pigeon in Leytonstone.

FACING PAGE: The huge skin left behind by the Polish mystery python.

- Charlie, a five-year-old Labrador cross, was bitten by adders in Bradenham, Norfolk, on 23 April 2018. He came into the house limping, with a swollen front paw. When the swelling spread, he was taken to the vet. His fur was clipped revealing two bites, one his paw and on his chest. The vet said the reaction was so severe they believed he had stepped on a pair of mating adders. He was pumped full of venom antidote, but was at death's door for five days. He needed four weeks of intensive care and two operations to repair his bladder and amputate a leg because of the necrotic effect of the poison. By July, Charlie was back to himself and learning to get about on three legs. *D.Mail*, 26 July 2018.

- Stephen Hague, 47, from Manchester, was on a Cornish beach when a 20in (50cm) adder sank its fangs into his big toe. As his foot ballooned, he staggered to the nearest road and flagged a taxi to Constantine Bay, Padstow. He was given heavy-duty painkillers but was still screaming like a baby. Adder bites are rare and no one has died from one for more than 20 years, apparently. *D.Mirror*, 16 Aug 2018.

- Around 27 July, Lisa Pell (49) came face to face with a 5ft (1.5m) Taiwanese beauty rat snake dangling outside her



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kitchen window in Flixborough, near Scunthorpe. It slithered off and hid behind some wood in the garden. Mrs Pell's husband eventually caught it when he got home from work, and it was taken to a local vet. As usual, it was not known where it had come from. *D.Mail*, 28 July 2018.

- A boa constrictor, thought to be an abandoned pet, was filmed eating a pigeon on High Road, Leytonstone, east London, on 4 August. The RSPCA took the snake to a wildlife centre. A spokeswoman for the charity

said it appeared "someone had found a dead pigeon and then given it to the snake". Dave Fawbert said when he discovered the animal on the pavement between a parked car and a row of shops, one passer-by screamed, and soon a big crowd gathered. The scene was filmed by Rachel Garland, 29, from Stratford. *BBC News*, 5 Aug; *Sun*, 6 Aug 2018.

- Before a race in Battersea Park, south-west London, in early August, a snake, thought to be a baby boa constrictor, was found

by a runner who had gone into the bushes to relieve himself. The organisers put it in a large plastic tub and it was collected by the RSPCA. *Guardian*, 7 Aug 2018.

- A woman who felt something slithering over her feet as she looked in her fridge saw a 7ft (2m) carpet python licking her toes. The snake had entered her house in Ware, Hertfordshire, and made a bed under the appliance. It was collected by the RSPCA. A spokeswoman explained that "it would have been collecting odour molecules with its tongue." The *Daily Mirror* (3 Aug 2018) said it was 3ft (90cm) long, while the *Sun* (same day) enlarged it to 7ft (2m).

- Drones were searching Poland's Vistula river after a huge snake skin was discovered, prompting fears that a 16ft (4.9m) Indian python could be on the loose just south of Warsaw. Police warned that the reptile might be hungry and aggressive, but offered no explanation for why it came to be in the river. *D.Telegraph*, 17 July 2018.

SIDELINES...

FEET OF CLAY

The conditions that caused the Tower of Pisa to have a five-degree tilt are also the reasons why it has survived four major quakes since building started in 1173. It rests on a relatively soft, pliable stratum of clay and sand, which absorbs the energy from major seismic events. *D.Mail*, 10 May 2018.

WELL-TRAVELLED SIGN

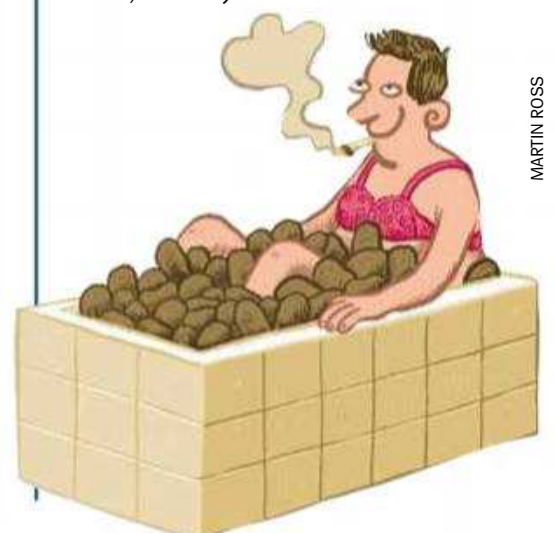
A 'For Sale' sign blown away by Hurricane Sandy from a seafront house in New Jersey has been found on a beach 3,589 miles (5,776km) away. The sign had been mounted in the back garden of a property in the Jersey Shore town of Brielle in October 2012. It was found more than five years later on the Plage du Pin Sec near Bordeaux, western France. An oceanographer said it might have been on its third Atlantic crossing. *D.Telegraph*, 2 June 2018.

RODENT FEAST

Technicians who arrived to fix a malfunctioning cash machine at the State Bank of India branch in Tinsukia, Assam, on 11 June found that notes worth more than 1.2m rupees (£13,300) had been shredded by rats. Police said they had probably entered the machine through a hole for wiring. [R] *BBC News*, 20 June 2018.

POTATO PUZZLE

James Johnson and two friends booked into the Travelodge in Eastleigh, Hampshire, for a one-night binge that turned into a longer stay. On the fifth night, staff smelt cannabis, entered the room and found Johnson dressed in woman's clothing, filling the bathtub with potatoes. "My client is an intelligent man who has made a mistake," said his defence solicitor at his trial. *Southern Daily Echo*, 23 May 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

IPHONE NESSIE

Charlotte Robinson, 12, from Leeds, was on holiday in the Scottish Highlands with her parents on 17 August when she "spotted something" in the waters of Loch Ness, about 50ft (15m) from the shore, and captured it on her iPhone. "It had the neck and head in the shape of a hook," she said. "After about a minute it disappeared and then [some seven minutes later] came back up again in a different place [about 10ft/3m away]. I kind of believed in Nessie, but I wanted to see the proof. I've seen something, but I'm not sure what... I just took what I saw. It was black – I just don't know how far it was out of the water. I'm not good at judging distances."

Steve Feltham, 55, who has spent the last 27 years scanning the loch for Nessie, said: "This is just the image we have been waiting for – for years. It warrants further study.



There may be a mundane explanation such as a seal, but I have not heard of a seal in the loch this year. For my money it is larger than a seal or otter." Mr Feltham is recognised by *Guinness World Records* for the longest continuous monster hunting vigil of Loch Ness.

This year there have been four Nessie sightings accepted by the Official Loch Ness Sightings' Register, including one on 5 August. On 1 June there was the first

Nessie sighting by moonlight. Another was on 30 April, when hospital clerical worker Eoin O'Faodhagain, 53, from Donegal shot a 10-minute film of a creature moving across the loch. The creature moves from right to left and as it swims towards Urquhart Bay is seen diving and surfacing with water splashes. In 2017 there were 11 'accepted' Nessie sightings – the highest score this century. *D.Mirror*, 1 June; *dailymail.co.uk*, 22 Aug; *Metro*, 23 Aug 2018.

PETER JOLLY / NORTHPIX



SIDELINES...

HOW TICKLED I AM

A woman seen to laugh uproariously when she sees other people being tickled has mirror-touch synæsthesia, a condition that makes people feel sensations on their own body when they watch other people touching things. Scientists at the University of California, San Diego, said she even got a “double dose” by watching a video of herself being tickled – an extreme example of empathy. *Metro*, 24 May 2018.

GRIM REAPER

After eating a chilli pepper called the Carolina Reaper, the world’s hottest, at a US pepper-eating contest, an unnamed 34-year-old man was hospitalised in 2016 with intense neck pain and ‘thunder-clap’ headaches, each lasting only a few seconds. He had reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome (narrowing of the brain arteries). His symptoms cleared up on their own after five weeks. *BMJ Case Reports*, *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, 10 April 2018.

SHOE FETISHIST

Andrew Muster, 44, crept around Melbourne’s northern suburbs in socks stealing shoes from people’s homes to feed a crippling impulse disorder. He never broke into a house and never wore the shoes. Over six years, he stole 2,400 pairs. He was fined £2,230. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 5 May 2018.

MOODS MONITORED

Chinese firms are using electronic sensors fitted into uniform hats or safety helmets to measure brainwaves and detect emotions like anxiety, depression and rage. A psychology professor at Beijing University criticised the government-backed technology, saying: “The selling of Facebook data is bad enough. Brain surveillance can take privacy abuse to a whole new level.” *D.Telegraph*, 1 May 2018.

OH BEEHAVE

One million killer bees are terrorising the Texas town of El Paso, after shacking up in the walls and roof of an elderly couple’s house. Mr and Mrs Murphy, who cannot afford to have the hybrid European / African bees removed, have instead learned to live with them. “Last year, they weren’t quite as aggressive as they are this year”, Mrs Murphy said. *Independent*, 14 April 2018.

WHOLPHINS AND GEEPS

Nature throws up some odd hybrids



CASCADIA RESEARCH

WHOLPHIN IN HAWAII

Researchers studying a pod of rarely spotted melon-headed whales off the island of Kauai in Hawaii noticed that one particular creature stood out. They took a skin biopsy from afar using a crossbow, and a DNA test found the creature was not a melon-headed whale nor a rough-toothed dolphin – the latter being common in the area – but a hybrid of the two, dubbed a wholphin. This male has a blotchy colour pattern that matches that of its rough-toothed dolphin father, and also sports the dorsal cape of its melon-headed whale mother – a darker colouring on its back just below its dorsal fin.

Robin Baird, leader of the US-based Cascadia Research Collective that found the hybrid, said both species belong to the *Delphinidae* (oceanic dolphin) family. “Hybrids among different species of whales and dolphins have been previously recorded,” he said, “but this is the first case of a hybrid between these two species, and only the third confirmed case [with genetics] of a wild-born hybrid between two [*Delphinidae*] species.” A wholphin named Kekaimalu, born to an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin and sired by a false killer whale, was born at Sea Life Park in Hawaii in 1985 and was also fertile. Melon-headed whales, despite their name, belong to the larger dolphin family, *Delphinidae*, which also includes killer whales and pilot whales – so the name



KEITH HENEGHAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP: A hybrid between a melon-headed whale and a rough-toothed dolphin (foreground) swims with a melon-headed dolphin. **BELOW:** Twin geeps This and That.

‘wholphin’ is a tad misleading. Robin Baird explained: “Before anyone had a good idea of the actual taxonomic relationship among species, whalers and early scientists called a number of species ‘whales’.”

It is estimated that as many as 10 per cent of animal species and up to 25 per cent of plant species may occasionally breed with other species. Well-known hybrids include crosses between lions and tigers, known as ligers, and horse and zebras, called zorses. Their offspring have features that are intermediate to characteristics from both parents. The offspring of the bottlenose dolphin and false killer whale, for

example, has 66 teeth, compared with 88 in one parent and 44 in the other. *Times*, *D.Mail*, <i>30 July; *Live Science*, 1 Aug 2018.

A PAIR OF GEEPS

Daisy, a pet nanny goat from Claremorris in Co Mayo, Ireland, has given birth to healthy twin geeps (a rare combination of goat and sheep). Owner Angela Bermingham attributes the delivery to Daisy’s dalliance with a neighbouring Cheviot Ram. Angela said the geeps, named This and That, “likes playing and jumping up and down”. Daisy was originally borrowed from a friend to eat nettles. *Times*, 7 April 2018.

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PAUL SIEVEKING trains a weather eye on the landscape features revealed by the summer's heatwave

HEATWAVE REVELATIONS

Historic England took advantage of the summer's exceptionally dry weather to send up reconnaissance planes to hunt for cropmarks indicating monuments, buildings and burial chambers normally hidden beneath vegetation. As crops and grass growing over buried ditches, wood or stone hidden underground hold more moisture in the soil, so plants grow lusher, and the remains become apparent in the drought.

Among 1,500 discoveries were two Bronze or Iron Age settlements from Lansallos in Cornwall and Stoke-by-Clare in Suffolk, in which the outlines of roundhouses, animal enclosures and burial mounds could be seen. Two Neolithic 'cursus' monuments, that may once have been used in processions during ancient rituals, have appeared near Clifton Reynes, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. The long rectangular mounds are among the oldest megalithic structures in Britain and most of the 100-plus cursus monuments have been discovered through aerial surveys, as few survive above ground level. The outlines of four Iron Age square barrows were spotted at Pocklington near York. Previous square barrows found in the Yorkshire Wolds have contained exotic grave goods, such as chariots. Four prehistoric farms were spotted in Stogumber, Somerset, and Bronze Age mounds uncovered in Scropton, Derbyshire, overlain by evidence of mediæval farming. At Bicton in Devon a Roman farm was found, while in St Ives in Cornwall an Iron Age settlement and Bronze Age barrow were observed. At Tixall Hall near Stafford, details of lost Elizabethan buildings and gardens dating from 1555 are now visible.

In Scotland, Iron Age structures have turned up in the Borders, along with a temporary Roman camp near Peebles. In Wales, a Celtic site was discovered in the shadow of a castle ruin near Tywyn in Gwynedd. Prehistoric settlements have emerged in Monmouthshire along with a suspected Roman fortress. In South Wales a 'new' Roman fortress and town have been discovered between Caerwent and Caerleon.

One outstanding discovery is the outline of a large prehistoric henge near Newgrange in County Meath, Ireland. It has a diameter of 200m (656ft) and is believed to have been built around 2500 BC, 500 years after Newgrange. A separate investigation last year uncovered a passage tomb – about 40m (130ft) in diameter and about 500 years before Newgrange itself – at nearby Dowth Hall in the heart of the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage site. This is the area within the bend of the river Boyne that contains one of the world's most important prehistoric landscapes. One of six kerbstones found at



TOP: Bronze Age mounds and traces of mediæval farming revealed at Scropton, Derbyshire.



ABOVE: Details of lost Elizabethan buildings and gardens became visible at Tixall Hall near Stafford.

the tomb, decorated with Neolithic carvings, is among "the most impressive discoveries of megalithic art in Ireland for decades", according to the team of excavators. *Irish Times*, 11+12+17+21 July; *Times*, 28 July; *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 15 Aug 2018.

ROMAN WHALING

Until now, the Basque people were thought to be the first commercial whalers from the 11th century onwards. However, whale bones unearthed at Roman ruins suggest the animals were hunted 2,000 years ago. Using genetic fingerprinting and DNA analysis, researchers have identified right and grey whales from bones at Roman sites in the Strait of Gibraltar area. These species are no longer found anywhere near the Mediterranean. They might have entered

the Med from the Atlantic to give birth, roaming far from what was thought to be their historical range. The region was the centre of a massive fish-processing industry in Roman times and salted fish was traded right across the empire. The ruins of hundreds of factories with large salting tanks can still be seen today. If the Romans were exploiting fish such as tuna, they might also have been catching whales with boats and hand-held harpoons. Grey and right whales are easier to hunt than faster-moving sperm or fin whales, commonly found in the Med. However, it is not yet known the extent to which Romans were actively hunting whales, or whether a Roman whaling industry existed at all. The findings are published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B – Biological Sciences*. *BBC News*, 11 July 2018.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

229: FISHING OR PHISHING?

Those angling for more information should go to books 9 & 32 of Pliny's *Natural History*, which subsumes titbits from multiple other sources, many now lost. These (and Fort) may be augmented by Jerry Dennis, *It's Raining Frogs and Fishes* (2013) and Kevin Brookmeier, *Things That Fall From The Sky* (2007, esp p49).

Fish fall frequently in Fort – *Books, passim*, esp pp83-8, 244-5, 594-7. As usual, there is classical precedent, Athenæus, *Deipnosophists*, bk8 para333a, citing now lost sources: “I know, also, that it has rained fish in many places. In Chersonesus it rained fishes for three whole days. Certain persons have in many places seen it rain fishes; the same thing often happens with tadpoles.”

Of eight Homeric mentions (cf. HN Couch, ‘Fishing in Homer’, *Classical Journal* 31 1936, 303-14), one describes in simile someone casting from a cliff – presumably either the cliff was low or the line very long. Homer's heroes famously disdained fish. They would have made good Pythagoreans. In one of his zany edicts, their master forbade eating blackfish or red mullet. Athenians, by contrast, were so devoted to our finny friends that Aristophanes dubbed their city “as shiny as a sardine”.

Commenting on Aristophanes's *Clouds* (v96), 12th-century Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes tosses in the line “The hands of the tangle-fleeced one are to bury the sardine.” As I suggested (*Glotta* 69, 1991, 137-9), since Aristophanes is joking about boys playing with their genitals, there is probably some dirty *double-entendre* intended. “Sardinepeen: One whose penis is small and insignificant, and causes no pleasure” – Urban Dictionary. “If you can see my pussy, would you drop a sardine on the mat” – Mrs Slocombe. “*Fish* is prominent in the 19th-century vocabulary of venery” – Eric Partridge.

Samian tyrant Polycrates flung a jewelled ring into the sea – prefiguring Little Richard. Some days later, a fisherman presented him with a giant fish. When gutted, the ring fell out,



taken as a bad omen by Polycrates: not wrong; he was murdered, his corpse crucified (Herodotus, bk3 chs39-43).

A shipload of boys sent by Corinthian tyrant Periander to be castrated was turned back by a school of purple-fish (Pliny, bk9 ch41 para80).

Pliny had just mentioned the versatile Remora flatfish that combined aphrodisiac powers with abilities to prevent premature births and more impressively hinder courtroom litigations – useful ally for Rumpole.

“Like Arion on the dolphin's back” (*Twelfth Night* 1. 2. 15) reflects Herodotus (bk1 chs23-4) on his derring-do escape from pirates, courtesy of these music-loving mammals.

Pliny and others have a host of stories about dolphins falling in love with boys. Dolphins (Greek *dolphin*) apparently go in for inventive masturbatory techniques, prolonged foreplay, and multiple orgasms, being the only creatures (humans apart) who indulge in sex for non-procreative pleasure.

The giant whale Porphyrio terrorised Byzantine shipping for 50 years (Procopius, *Wars*, bk7 ch29 para9). Gibbon (ch33) jokes that the local aquanymphs were too often alarmed by his depredations. Pliny, also Pausanias (bk9 ch21), claim Nereids and Tritons – precursors of *The Creature from The Black Lagoon* – were seen and heard in Tiberius's reign (AD 14-37).

The all-purpose Roman stock *garum/liquamen* was based on rotten fish – as is Worcestershire Sauce.

Roman aristocrats were obsessed with pet fish – Cicero raves they would let the Republic go hang rather than lose their aquaria. They were trained

to come and eat when called by voice or bells. Hortensius the orator would never eat his own, weeping when a favourite died. Vedius Pollio was nastier, throwing errant slaves to be eaten alive by lampreys.

Eels [FT202:21] were decked out with earrings – “Eels are mysterious beings. It may be that their ‘breeding habits’ are teleportations” (Fort, p595). African author Apuleius (2nd-century AD) was accused of using ichthyomancy to seduce a married woman by conjuring up

a fish whose name translated as ‘Cunt’ (*Apology*, chs29-39). Imperial doctor Scribonius Largus (for my full account, see *Rheinisches Museum* 135, 1992, 74-82) pioneered electrical therapy by applying eels to aching heads (*Prescriptions*, 11, 162). Lucy Jones (*New Statesman*, 26 June 2015) wrongly says Claudius was his patient; Largus could not have cured that emperor's principal headaches: his wives, man-mad Messalina and atrabilious Agrippina.

Domitian (Juvenal, *Satire* 4) convened an emergency cabinet meeting on how to cook a giant turbot sent to him by a fisherman. After much futile debate, the obvious solution was reached: construct a giant casserole-dish.

When a fisherman scrambled up the rocks on Capri to present Tiberius with a whopping mullet, the alarmed emperor had his face rubbed with it. When the man exclaimed it was lucky he hadn't offered a concomitant lobster, Tiberius had him facially destroyed with that.

Nero (Suetonius, ch35 para5) had his stepson drowned whilst fishing – the one that didn't get away.

Two *Greek Anthology* epigrams (7.702, 704) describe anglers killed by fish presumed dead. This happened to a Thomas Clements (1826) who “expired in dreadful agony” (*Museum Criticum* 4, 1826, p593). News websites report (30 May 2015) a similar incident from Hawaii – case here for Five-O.

Two post-classical nuggets: Genghis Khan killed his half-brother in a spat over sharing a fish. Traveller Edward Webbe (1590) reports a Syrian river in which fish rose to the bait of Christians and Moslems, but never Jews.



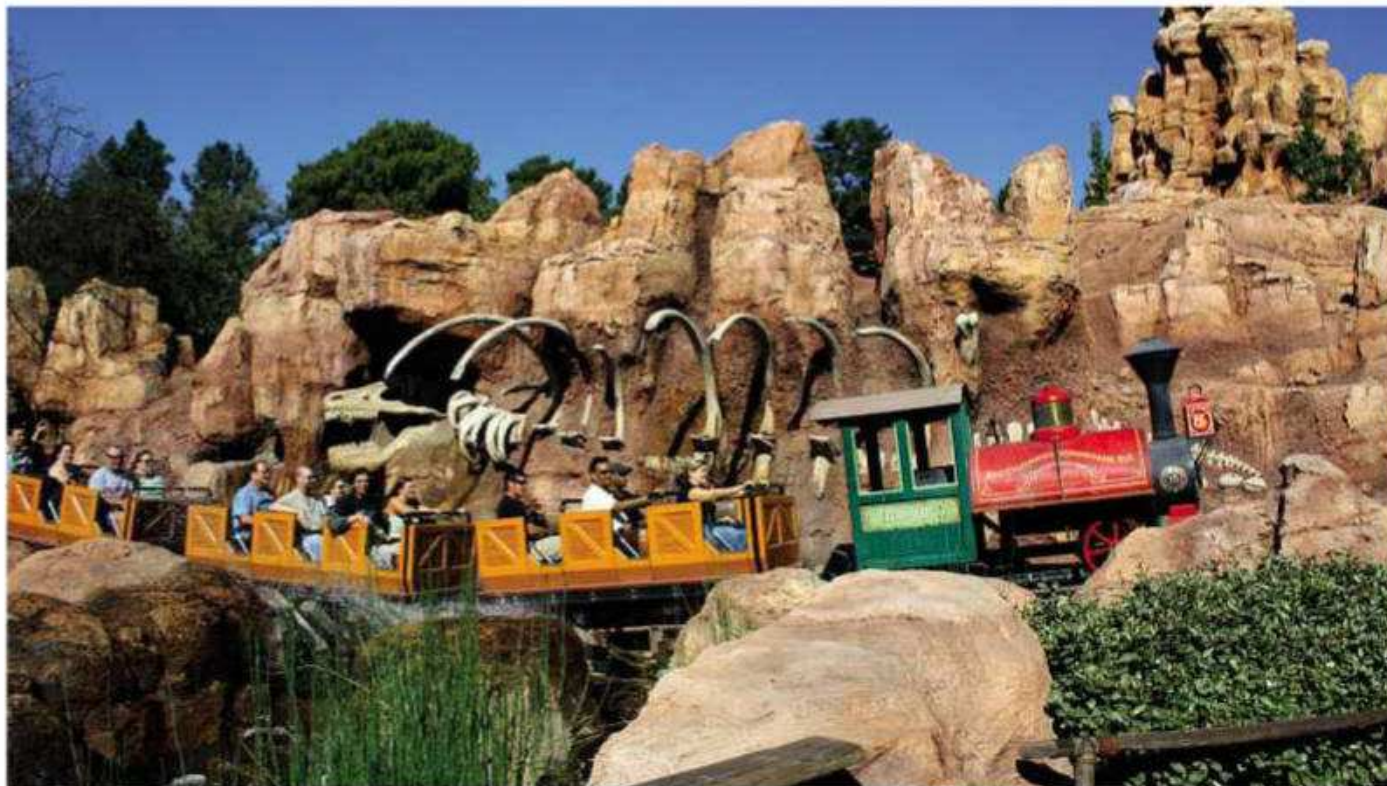
IG NOBEL PRIZES 2018

A self-colonoscopy technique and a novel way of getting rid of kidney stones are among the winners

The 28th annual Ig Nobel Prizes, organised by the *Annals of Improbable Research* bi-monthly magazine, were awarded on 13 September at Harvard's Sanders Theatre, packed to the rafters with Nobel laureates and a rapt audience. As customary, each winner had one minute to deliver an acceptance speech, the time limit strictly enforced by an eight-year-girl saying "Please stop, I'm bored" several times until the speaker finishes. And as usual, each award was accompanied by a cash prize in the form of a \$10 trillion bill from Zimbabwe, worth only a few pennies.

The prize for medicine went to Marc Mitchell and David Wartinger, for using roller coaster rides to try to hasten the passage of kidney stones. The inspiration behind the research began several years ago when one of Prof Wartinger's patients at Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine returned from a holiday trip to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. The patient reported that one of his kidney stones became dislodged after a ride on the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride (pictured above). Wondering whether it was caused by the ride or a coincidence, the patient went on the ride several more times and each time a stone popped out. Intrigued by the story, Prof Wartinger built a 3D-printed silicone model of his patient's renal system, including artificial kidney stones, and took it with him on numerous rides. He discovered that Big Thunder Mountain was indeed effective – more so than the scarier rides such as Space Mountain or Rock 'n' Roller Coaster that involve prolonged drops. Prof Wartinger concluded that this was because Big Thunder Mountain involves more up-and-down and side-to-side movements that "rattle" the rider.

Scientists are sometimes rudely described as being "up their own backsides" if they are thought to be too obsessed with their research. However,



One of his kidney stones became dislodged after a roller coaster ride

this is literally the case with a Japanese researcher, Dr Akira Horiuchi, who won the Medical Education Prize for devising a "self-colonoscopy" technique using a small endoscope. "This trial may be funny, but I inserted an endoscope into my colon for a serious purpose," he said. "People, especially in Japan, are afraid of colonoscopy and they do not want to undergo colonoscopy. So the number of people who die from colorectal cancer is increasing. I do this research to make colonoscopy easier and more comfortable, so fewer people will die". He reported only "mild discomfort".

The Reproductive Medicine Prize went to an international team for using postage stamps to measure nocturnal erections – as described in their study "Nocturnal Penile Tumescence Monitoring With Stamps", published in *The Journal of Urology*, vol. 15, way back in 1980. They instructed several male volunteers to wrap a ring

of postage stamps snugly around their penis at bedtime and check in the morning for tears in the perforation. The method was nearly 100 per cent accurate. The researchers clarified that they manufactured their own stamps for the experiment, as using official US postage "required permission from the Secret Service."

The Literature Prize was awarded for an investigation into instruction manuals for consumer products, called "Life Is Too Short to RTFM: How Users Relate to Documentation and Excess Features". "RTFM" is an acronym for "read the field manual", though frustrated consumers have given it a new meaning.

James Cole won the Nutrition Prize for calculating that pound per pound, it is not worth eating human flesh compared with other types of meat. His paper, entitled "Assessing the Calorific Significance of Episodes of Human Cannibalism in the Paleolithic", was published in *Scientific Reports*, vol. 7, no. 44707, in April 2017.

The Anthropology Prize was won by a team who collected evidence, in a zoo, that chimpanzees imitate humans about as often, and about as well, as humans imitate chimpanzees. For economics, the winner was

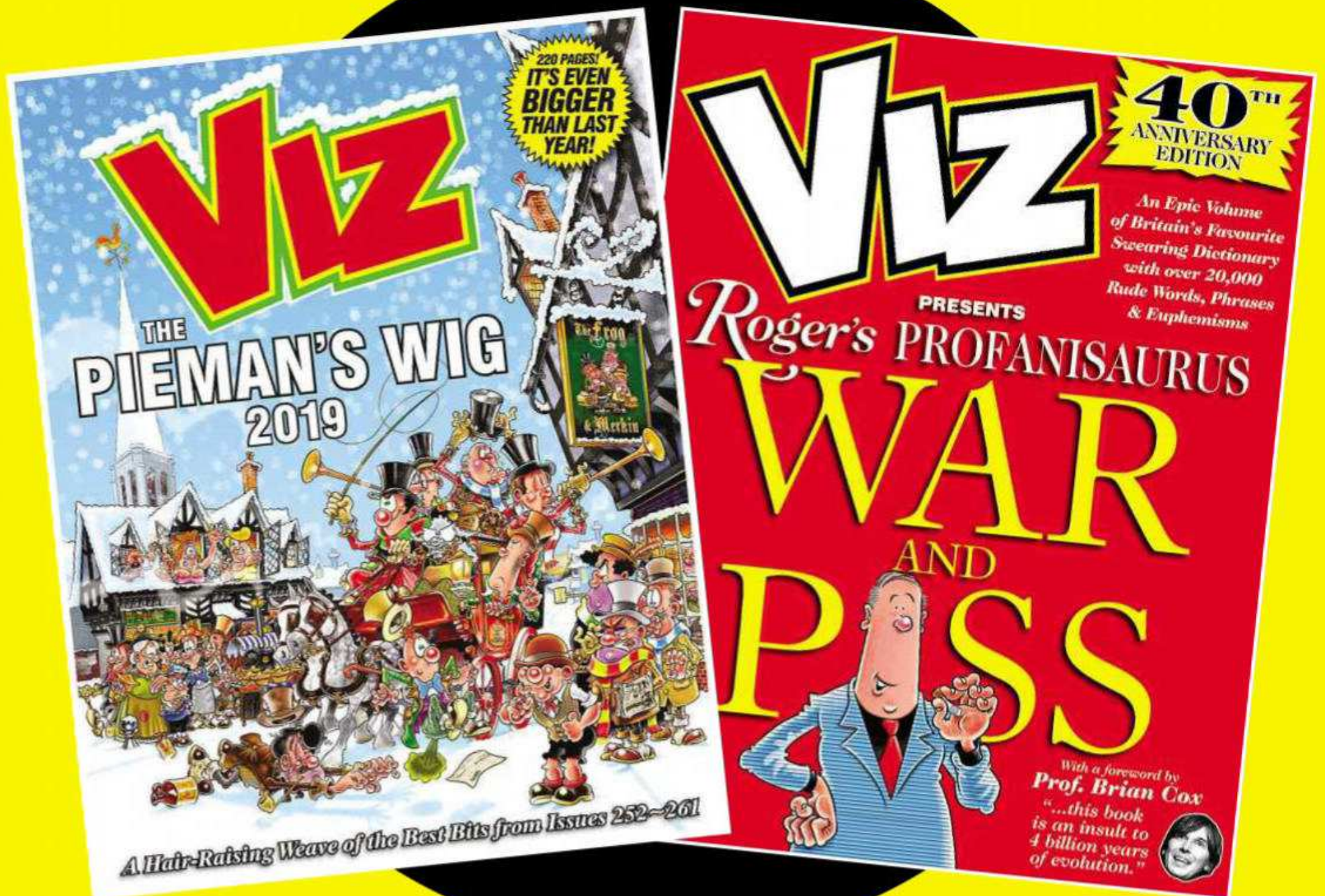
research investigating whether it is effective for employees to use voodoo dolls to retaliate against bullying bosses. This study, published in *The Leadership Quarterly* last February, showed that taking it out on dolls does alleviate negative feelings, but suggested that, in the long run, it was better to deal with the underlying issue.

The Chemistry Prize went to Portuguese research that settled the issue of whether human saliva is a good cleaning agent for dirty surfaces. It is – especially for fragile, painted areas on ceramics, and on gold leaf. The Biology Prize went to an international team for demonstrating that wine experts can reliably identify, by smell, the presence of a fly in a glass of wine – possibly sparking a new genre of jokes involving sommeliers.

Last but not least, the Peace Prize went to a Spanish group that aimed to find ways of reducing road rage, in a paper entitled "Shouting and Cursing While Driving: Frequency, Reasons, Perceived Risk and Punishment". The team's solution is to try to reduce stress on the road – a task as sizable as reducing conflict in the Middle East. *improbable.com*, *sciencemag.org*, 13 Sept; *BBC News*, 14 Sept 2018.



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Dreams and ghosts, part two

ALAN MURDIE explores some unconventional, and largely forgotten, theories about dreaming



LEFT: A memorial marking the site of the house where Freud started *The Interpretation of Dreams*. “Do you suppose that some day a marble tablet will be placed on the house, inscribed with these words: ‘In this house on July 24, 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigm. Freud’? At the moment I see little prospect of it.” Freud in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 12 June 1900.

that the mind of the dreamer accounts for the part played in this dream by one of the actors involved (myself), it certainly does not account for the part played by the other. Nor does it account for the psychological reactions on either side.” He stated: “The dream-personalities, then, have a genuine experience – at least one of them (myself) has it, and the other (my antagonist) appears to have it also.

“One of them remembers his experience and can report it afterwards. My own conclusion is that the dream-duel actually occurred in the same sense that any duel, or any event, actually occurs... I would not go the length of saying that it occurred to *me*: but it occurred to *somebody*. Whatever difficulties may beset this conclusion – and they are mainly difficulties of exposition – they are less, in my opinion, than those which attach to any other hypothesis or explanation.”

It is an extraordinary theory that two personalities or more may be present in dreams, and one which would have seemed fantastic to many educated people in the Western world by the end of the 16th century, let alone in the second decade of the 20th century. Thomas Nashe in his *The Terrors of the Night* (1594) ascribed dreams to fancies of melancholy and imagination, writing: “A dreame is nothing els but a bubbling scum or froath of the fancie, which the day hath left undigested; or an after feast made of the fragments of idle imaginations.” Philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) blamed “motions within us”, the “reliques” of previous sensations. But many routinely have dreams that in no way relate to waking experiences, save on some symbolic level. The rise of the romantic movement unleashed tides of speculation about the mysterious origins of dreams, in turn ebbing with the growth of materialist thinking in medicine from the early 19th century, when dreams were attributed to organic causes. Nonetheless, the problem still remains today how our brains,

“The whole subject of dreams is virtually an unexplored territory waiting for the psychologist who will make it his province in a thoroughly serious spirit”. So once declared Professor Lawrence Pearsall Jacks (1860-1955) of Oxford in a long-forgotten paper carried by the *SPR Journal* in 1916 and entitled “Dramatic Dreams: An Unexplored Field for Psychical Research”. Professor Jacks set about his speculations, “after reading as much of the literature of dreams as I could lay my hands on, including the work of Freud”. Sigmund Freud had famously published his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in 1900, considered his greatest work (even by Freud himself), arguing the unconscious mind is laid bare in dreams. Freud was open to psychical research (his first paper in English was actually published in the *SPR Journal*), but the hypothesis that Jacks sketched would have seem far-fetched and, indeed, preposterous to many at the time. Intensely interesting to Jacks was the question of different personalities manifesting in what he termed ‘dramatic dreams’. Such personalities appeared distinct from those of waking consciousness, but received little attention, “the neglect of them [being] disgraceful and astonishing. They are treated as a negligible side-show; or as belonging to some realm of nonsense which it is beneath the dignity of the psychologist to consider.”

It is an extraordinary theory that two or more personalities may be present in dreams

Keen to lift the veil on dream-life whilst recognising the deficiencies of language to describe such inner experiences, Jacks focused upon personalities that had appeared in two dreams of his own. One arose in a dream of being lost in China and meeting a man in a strange costume issuing directions. The second dream was of fighting a duel with another man, using rapiers. Jacks maintained these dream personalities were different to imagined fictional characters in *Hamlet* or *Robinson Crusoe* where the creations were limited to what the author made them say or do.

The puzzle for Jacks was how these dream personalities seemed both to react spontaneously to each other at a time when consciousness of the self was apparently transferred to one the personalities created, considering that “the mind cannot prepare surprises for itself, any more than a man can play chess with himself.”

“The suggestion I make is this: even allowing – what is very difficult to allow –

metaphorical ‘computers made of meat’, succeed in generating consciousness, let alone detailed dream adventures.

As a philosopher, Professor Jacks was well aware of the limitations in his hypothesis involving a separate personality, wholly distinct from that of the dreamer. He recognised upon a strict evidential basis that his opponent in the dream-duel lacked any independent verification, “my antagonist cannot be found or called as a witness. This assuredly leaves my evidence without his corroboration, but does not affect its value as far as it goes. It is a difficulty, but not a fatal one... for the fact that my antagonist cannot be found is no proof that he never existed...” (*SPR Journal*, v.17, 1916, pp.178-183).

His point was that it is a difficult matter to prove, other than to oneself, the existence of your own mind and mental states; indeed, how does one actually prove the content of any dream, save on the uncorroborated word of the dreamer on waking? No one denies people have dreams, including the rarer class of lucid dreams when the dreamer realises that s/he is dreaming; but proving this is another matter.

Of the duel and his antagonist, he later wrote: “He was a very lively gentleman whom I would recognize among a thousand if I were to meet him to-morrow. Who, in heaven’s name, was he? ... What an interesting light would be thrown on the matter if it should turn out that at the very time that ‘I’ dreamed ‘I’ was fighting ‘him’, somebody else dreamed that ‘he’ was fighting ‘me’. When the matter comes to be fully investigated it may be found that in dreams also there are such things as cross-correspondences.” (*SPR Journal*, v.17, 1916, pp. 202-03).

More recently, similar questions have arisen in relation to the question of the reality of the apparently interactive visions of relatives and friends that dying patients report in their final days and hours (see *Ghostwatch* **FT311:16-17**) and with spirit ‘guides’ whom mediums and spiritualists report communicating on a mental plane, either during séances where they act as a kind of master of ceremonies, or manifest spontaneously with messages, both long and short. Voluminous evidence exists for trance personalities at some level, judging by the performance of mediums over the years and the thousands of pages of scripts and galleries of artistic works



LEFT: Professor Lawrence Pearsall Jacks wrote a paper on the appearance of separate personalities in dreams.

generated in automatic writing credited to them. For a fascinating modern example, see *Consulting Spirit: A Doctor’s Experience with Practical Mediumship* (2011) by Ian Rubenstein, detailing the experiences of a sceptical but quietly courageous GP in London who found himself on a path to mediumship in the 21st century. Are these performances all purely coming from the brain of the medium, or is there an external influence at work?

This was a question that the English courts backed away from in 1927 in the case of *Cummins v Bond* [1927] 1 Ch 167, where the High Court ruled in favour of copyright going to medium Geraldine Cummins rather than psychic researcher Frederick Bligh Bond.

Personally, I think proposals in a recent Forum piece [**FT363:50-51**] that Bond was a conscious fraud promoting what he saw as a higher spiritual calling (the allegation of him being ‘bent for the job’ in common parlance) are erroneous. Though both plaintiff and defendant were united in attributing lengthy scripts to discarnate entities or an external source or power, they were both considered sincere by Mr Justice Eve, who had the advantage of

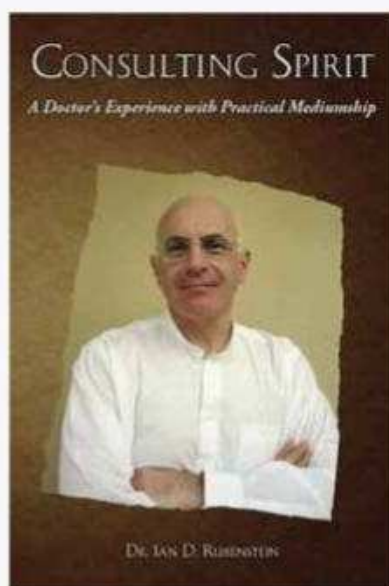
hearing them direct. Nonetheless, the judge refused to explore their claims, considering his jurisdiction did not run beyond the grave in the event they were correct.

Mainstream science separates out and leaves aside the personal and private

elements in dreams without denying anything of their reality for the individuals concerned, simply because it is concerned with public reality in terms of what is quantifiable. The question is how much of an experience can be set out so as to make it common? Even though at variance with many of his ideas, Freud was prepared to accept the possibility of telepathic dreams, a view many of psychoanalytic successors shied away from, with a few exceptions (e.g. Jule Eisenbud, *Parapsychology and the Unconscious*, 1983).

At the very least, taking an Occam’s razor approach to all evidence, Freud accepted the probability of synchronous dreams covering the same content arising from the unconscious minds of separate ‘disconnected’ living parties being brought together. Visual apparitions – which GNM Tyrrell attributed to a deeper level of the self, boosted by telepathic influence from beyond the observer’s brain – appear to be capable of being experienced by more than one percipient. Cases recorded by psychical researchers indicate certain experiences of a vivid character that the ‘dreamer’ feels are something more than a dream or contain information that turns out to be true (so called veridical hallucinations) – and I have found those who experience apparently precognitive dreams also report apparitional experiences, sometimes crossing the boundaries between categories (‘A Precognitive Dream of A Flood Disaster: A Quasi Hit regarding the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami Disaster’ by Alan Murdie, *Paranormal Review*, issue 9, July 2006). As Professor Ronald Hutton has pointed out, a considerable number of people in Western society have complex experiences of a psychic or spiritual nature, which do not fit comfortably into any existing paradigm (*Triumph of the Moon*, 2000).

Admittedly, such discussions will seem absurd to those who are convinced that dreams can only originate from the mind of the dreamer. It also seems a long way from the classic stories contained in popular ghost books of encountering a ghost, spooky tales in numerous local works on phantoms, and even specialised surveys of hauntings and apparitions. However, I do not think we should limit our viewpoint by our tendency to opt for a single explanation that will account for all cases of a particular type. It seems to me safer, and more valuable in the search for truth, to preserve two or more categories for experiences that





GHOSTWATCH

otherwise resemble each other. Some dreams seem to be exclusively the work of the mind of the dreamer, whereas others may arise from a composite (at least partly) from the activity of deceased or dying persons who may be regarded as in some sense “present” within the dream they are seen. In my view, a broader approach allows us also to conceive of a range of intermediate types in which the dreamer and an external mind may be contributing different proportions to the percipient’s dream.

Cases where testimony is obtained from two or more witnesses are rare, but a striking instance occurred in the family of the Rev Charles Tweeddale, whose mother died on 11 January 1879. Before the news of her death had reached the relatives concerned, she was perceived by three persons in bed in different rooms, all of whom believed themselves to have been awake at the time. Two were in different rooms in the same house, the third being in another house 20 miles away. The delay, compared with the time of death, was two hours in the case of the first two (*SPR Journal*, v.12, pp.322-28, Nov 1906).

Unfortunately, a psychological prejudice often applies with old material – in that instance all three percipients were closely related to the person ‘seen’ (husband, son, and sister). Cases where the agent and percipient are strangers to one another are rarely ‘picked up’, unless falling into the category of hauntings, reports of which anyone can soon obtain if researchers adopt the ‘get out of your hammock’ approach endorsed by the late Guy Playfair, going out and talking with people openly (Guy Playfair, *The Indefinite Boundary*).

A more modern example (and one that indirectly has gone on to greatly benefit psi research today) occurred in 1966 and was published as ‘Two Synchronous Experiences Connected with a Death’ in the *SPR Journal*. The percipient was a gentleman given the pseudonym ‘Peter Davidson’. Early in 1966 his mother suffered a coronary and died in hospital on 20 February 1966 at just before 3am. Some 48 hours later, ‘Mr Davidson’ was in his flat in Knightsbridge when, in the early hours of 22 February, he found himself “in a state of what I presume is called a trance... lying in bed on my back in a sleep-like conscious state. I did not (or could not?) move and was panting with a heavy heart beat (I thought/felt ‘this is



LEFT: Rev Charles Tweeddale and Mrs Tweeddale in a ‘spirit’ photograph taken by William Hope.

what my Mother experienced at the time of her death’).

Mentally, he saw a television screen and began thinking: “I am now going to see my Mother and Father together or a message in pictorial form”. But this did not happen; instead, he saw only “some female nut brown hair coming out of the TV screen, in the bottom right hand corner” which was different to his mother’s (hers had “been black going grey and very long. This was short and curly”). He reached out to grasp and pull the hair towards himself but instead of coming towards me “it literally pulled me head first through the TV screen”. He found himself floating and not needing to breathe and having “an instant glimpse of a golden yellow light above me”, but otherwise saw or heard nothing and had no reckoning as to the lapse of time.

Coming round on his bed, his heart starting again, he felt ecstatic: “My heart felt burning hot with love and joy – words cannot describe it. I felt my heart being filled with liquid divine love – an exquisitely heavenly experience. I was now fully conscious and breathing quite normally with my eyes still closed. I no longer heard my heart beats.” It was followed by visions from childhood days and of an incident where his mother had been knocked down by a car three years earlier.

Opening his eye, he saw a luminous cloud close to his face. He hoped it would form into his mother’s face, but it simply vanished.

Switching on the light and looking at his watch, the time was 2.55am. Suppressing a strong urge to contact his sister

‘Constance’, he left visiting her until the next day, the feeling of elation remaining with him, sadness over his mother gone.

On going to his sister’s the next morning, he learned that Constance had also undergone an extraordinary experience the previous night. She had been very unhappy the previous evening, alone in the flat and weeping. She took a strong sedative, but was later awakened by a feeling of her head or hair being pulled; she then heard her mother’s voice speaking, but could see nothing in the room. She then called out “Mummy, darling” and her mother repeated the message: “Nobody need reproach themselves for *anything*. All my children have been wonderful.”

This voice seemed to go right through the flat. It sounded like their mother’s voice when she was much younger, perhaps 30 or 40 years previously, “very strong and clear”.

‘Constance’ then switched on her light and found the time to be 3am (but she said that this could have been four or five minutes fast). She felt compelled to write down the message immediately; like her brother she was overjoyed.

The two experiences had positive effects on both siblings and were broadly the same. Mr Davidson stated: “The feeling of ecstasy lasted for around two weeks, fading away very gradually. It has left me with a very happy feeling about my experience, an absolute conviction of survival of the human personality, an awareness and a strong desire to be a better and more loving person than I was before I had the experience.”

This account contains elements suggestive of sleep paralysis, and similarities may be found here with the dreams, analysed in David Hufford’s classic study *The Terror That Comes by Night* (1982), of the ‘Old Hag Syndrome’ among populations in Newfoundland. Yet Hufford was also honest enough to admit that there was no simple, all-encompassing explanation for such experiences. Whatever the case, it remains an attestation to the impression made upon Mr Davidson and within his family that, many years later, he bequeathed a large sum in his will to the Society for Psychical Research and from which the Society is now currently benefitting.

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FORTUNATE FALLS

Perilous plummets from balconies, windows, waterfalls, cliffs and even mountains leave lucky escapees with only minor injuries

- On 11 July, a girl aged two-and-a-half, from Changzhou in China's Jiangsu Province, fell from the 17th floor of an apartment building, sustaining only minor injuries. The girl's grandmother had left her sleeping while she went shopping. When the girl woke up, she searched for her grandmother, leaned out an open window, lost her balance and plunged 17 floors onto a small garden outside the apartment building, just as her grandmother was making her way back upstairs. Eyewitnesses said the girl rose to her feet almost instantly after hitting the ground, started crying and went straight for the front door of her building. She was rushed to hospital, where a CT scan revealed no brain abnormalities, while an X-ray showed some minor fissures to her ribs. An abdominal ultrasound showed some minor bruising of the liver, which, under the circumstances, was nothing short of miraculous. The girl was discharged right after her examination. It is believed that tree branches had cushioned the girl's fall, and she was lucky that it had rained the night before, so the ground was softer. *thaivisa.com*, 2 Aug 2018.

- Last year, a little girl who fell from a second-floor window in Levenshulme, Greater Manchester, escaped with just a bump to the head after landing on an old sofa. *BBC News*, 15 Feb 2017.

- A boy of seven survived a fall from a 10-storey building in Suzhou, China, after using an umbrella as a parachute, in imitation of a television cartoon character. *D.Telegraph*, 22 April 2017.

- On 27 May, a boy aged 16 months fell 30ft (9m) from a third-floor window in Tontine Street, Folkestone, Kent. He was flown to hospital for examination, but had no serious injuries and was discharged within days. *D.Express*, 29 May 2017.



ABOVE: A young woman dangles from power lines after falling from a fourth-floor window in Liaoning Province in China in July 2017.

- On 21 June, a two-year-old boy playing with his sister bounced on a bed and straight out of an open second-storey window in Chelsea, Massachusetts. He fell 16ft (5m) onto concrete, but luckily he was holding a huge stuffed cow, which broke his fall. The boy's great uncle said he took the stuffed animal with him everywhere. He had some cuts but was otherwise fine. *[AP]* 23 June 2017.

- A young woman in north-eastern China's Liaoning Province survived falling from a fourth-floor window after she was caught in some power lines. She was seen dangling upside down after her feet and legs got caught up in the cables in the city of Benxi. She was apparently washing windows when she

lost her balance, fell, and fainted from shock. Firefighters managed to bring her safely to the ground. She was rushed to hospital, where her condition was described as stable. *metro.co.uk*, 4 July 2017.

- In an apparent suicide attempt, Juan Jose Chavez Perla, 48, leapt from an 18th floor restaurant window in Lima, Peru, and landed on a taxi after hitting power lines. He was stretchered to hospital, conscious and talking. *D.Mirror*, 14 Oct 2017.

- A 65-year-old Russian woman survived a fall from a fourth-floor balcony after being swept away by a gust of wind when she went outside for a cigarette on Boxing Day. She landed in a large snowdrift, sustaining a broken

arm and three broken ribs. She was taken to hospital in a loading vehicle because an ambulance was unable to reach her in the town of Shakhtyorsk on Sakhalin island, off Russia's Pacific coast. *Times*, 27 Dec 2017.

- On 26 January, experienced fell runner Scott Baxter, 39, of Whitefield, Greater Manchester, survived a 500ft (152m) plunge from a snow-covered peak in the Lake District while trying to help a walker who had fallen. He dashed to help the stranger, but as he reached the injured man he slipped off Brown Cove Crag at Helvellyn. He landed in snow and escaped with bruises, scratches and a few broken ribs. A rescue team was stunned to find him walking about. *D.Express*, 30 Jan 2018.

- On 28 January, a sleepwalking Randy Phothisane, 35, tumbled six stories out of an apartment window in New York's Lower East Side. His girlfriend said that he took her sleeping pills before hitting the sack. At around 5am, Phothisane climbed out of her eighth-floor window on South Street near Clinton Street and fell onto scaffolding six stories below, wearing nothing but boxer shorts. He escaped with a broken leg and rib, and injuries to his back and torso. *NY Post*, 29 Jan 2018.

- On 13 May, a boy of three escaped with just a face scratch after plunging 150ft (46m) down a waterfall and landing in a 2ft (60cm) pool. An aunt who tried to grab him when he slipped also fell 25ft (8m) down the Llanrhaeadr Waterfall – one of the Seven Wonders of Wales – landing in a tree. The boy was pulled from the water by a tourist and the aunt was rescued by a climber. The pair, named only as Nathan and Gabby from Liverpool, were treated for shock and minor injuries. Llanrhaeadr Waterfall in Powys is 240ft (73m) tall at its highest point – 72ft (22m) higher than Niagara Falls. *D.Post*, 16 May; *Sun*, *D.Express*, 17 May 2018.



KARL SHUKER welcomes back a long-lost tree kangaroo and ponders the lore of the corncrake

A TREE-MENDOUS REDISCOVERY!

In 1928, during an expedition to what is now West Papua, a province in the western, Indonesian half of New Guinea, celebrated American zoologist Dr Ernst Mayr collected a single adult male specimen of a hitherto undescribed species of tree kangaroo, with distinctive yellow-tipped blackish fur, in montane forest at an elevation of approximately 5,250ft (1,600m) on Mount Wondiwoi. Five years later, and in honour of its discoverer, this new species was formally dubbed *Dendrolagus mayri*, but no additional specimen has ever been obtained. Moreover, no additional specimen has even been observed – until July 2018, that is. A full 90 years after Mayr procured its type (and only) specimen, the Wondiwoi tree kangaroo made a most unexpected reappearance – and, happily, its rediscoverer just so happened to be armed with a good camera!

Deep in Mt Wondiwoi's rainforest on the final day of a two-week trip to West Papua in search of orchids, British amateur naturalist Michael Smith, a zoology graduate from Farnham, Surrey, spotted something mammalian moving about in a tree,



at a height above his head of around 90ft (27m). Smith was already aware from local testimony that this mountain is reputedly home to an exceedingly elusive form of tree kangaroo, so he lost no time in photographing the arboreal creature, which certainly looked like a tree kangaroo – and not just any tree kangaroo either. It looked just like the long-lost Wondiwoi tree kangaroo.

And when Smith's photos were scrutinised by the world's leading expert on tree kangaroos, Australian zoologist Prof. Tim Flannery, who has personally discovered no fewer than four new tree kangaroo species, Flannery stated that the depicted creature was "definitely" *D. mayri*: "Everything in the pictures is consistent with the only known specimen. It is an extremely significant

find. I was amazed when I saw the photographs. I believe it has gone unspotted for so long because it is restricted to a single, small mountain range". Smith now hopes to return to Mt Wondiwoi in 2019, with experts and camera traps, and to collect tree kangaroo faeces there, from which DNA can then be extracted for comparison with DNA obtained from Mayr's 1928 type specimen. www.dailymail.co.uk, 19 Aug; www.huffingtonpost.co.uk, 20 Aug 2018.

HIBERNATING CORNCRAKES?

Long ago, before scientists confirmed that British swallows overwinter in Africa, migrating annually to enjoy the continent's far warmer climate, it was popularly but incorrectly believed that these birds actually remain in Europe throughout the winter but are not seen during that season because they spend the entire time buried in mud at the bottom of ponds, in a state of torpor or hibernation. Nowadays, conversely, only one species of bird is known to hibernate – the common poor-will *Phalacrocorax nuttallii*, a North American relative of the nightjars. However, while perusing an early journal recently, I discovered a remarkable account, hitherto unknown to me, suggesting that a second, very different species of bird – namely, the corncrake *Crex crex* – may also undergo this extreme physiological feat, even if only very occasionally. (Like swallows, corncrakes are only summer visitors to Britain, migrating to Africa for overwintering.) Due to its extraordinary claim, the decidedly fortaean nature of the incident behind it, and the fact that I have never seen any mention of it in any modern-day publication, I am republishing this account here, and would greatly welcome any input that *FT* readers may

wish to provide. It appeared in volume 8 of the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, 1823, and consisted of the following letter written by a Major Morrison:

"As it still appears a matter of doubt, whether the Corncrake should be included among those birds that occasionally fall into a torpid state during the winter, I beg to offer the following circumstance towards settling this point. A gentleman of the town of Monaghan, in Ireland, some years since, had, on or near his farm, a large heap of manure that had remained undisturbed for a considerable length of time. The labourers, in removing this manure in winter, and during a frost, perceived a hole in the side of the heap, which had probably been made by rats; and, after a great portion of the manure had been taken away, they came to the end of the hole, where they found three corncrakes, as if they had been placed there with the greatest care, not a feather being out of its place, and apparently lifeless. The circumstance surprised the workmen so much, that they took the birds to the farmer, who, having examined them, was of opinion they were in a torpid state; and being desirous of ascertaining whether it was the case, placed them near a fire in a warm room. In the course of a very

short time, he observed a tremulous motion in a leg of one of the birds. He soon after noticed motion in the legs and wings of the whole. Efforts to move and rise became rapidly more apparent; and, finally, the birds were enabled to run and fly about the room. These particulars were related to me by the farmer in the year 1806."

As manure retains heat very effectively, the corncrakes' survival deep within the pile noted above is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility, especially if their physiological systems had shut down to the minimal sustaining state characterising hibernation. Since chancing upon this account, I have sought to uncover any additional ones. Yet although I have read several general mentions of folkloric belief in this bird's supposed proclivity for hibernating if remaining in Europe during the winter season, I have not encountered any reports or details of specific incidents like the alleged example documented here. Consequently, I'd greatly welcome any input that readers may be able to offer, as it would be fascinating to discover if the hitherto-obscure issue of hibernating corncrakes actually has a basis in reality. *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, vol.8, pp.414-415 (1823).



MEDICAL BAG

A recent film has put the controversial condition known as Morgellons disease back in the spotlight. But is it a new illness or an old delusion?

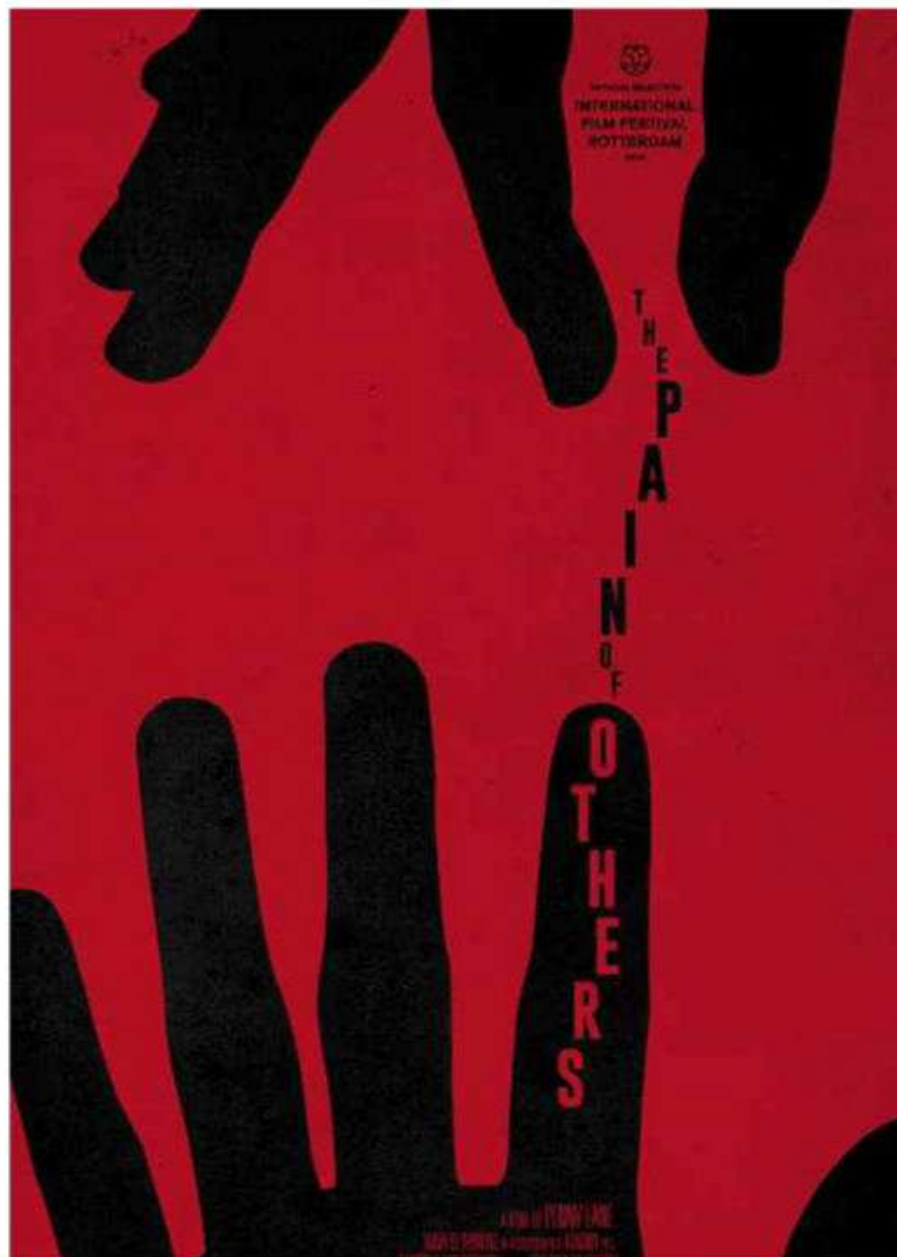
A recent film release, *The Pain of Others* (2018), has been described as a body-horror documentary along the lines of David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) or *Dead Ringers* (1988). No fiction, it focuses on three women suffering from a strange illness, Morgellons disease, characterised by untreatable sores that appear all over the body, an extreme itching sensation giving rise to the idea that insects are creeping over or beneath the skin, and, most bizarrely, wormlike threads or filaments that erupt from the sores. *Boston Globe*, 28 June 2018.

Similar symptoms have been reported for over a decade. In 2006, a Florida journalist, quoting a Ms Brandi Koch of Clearwater Beach, wrote that "she feels as if she's living in a horror movie." Life was good for Ms Koch, until one day, whilst taking a shower, "she noticed something strange – tiny fibres running through her skin. 'The fibres look like hair, and they're different colours,' she said." *ABC News*, 9 Aug 2006.

Morgellons sufferers speak of a compulsion to pick at their skin, because of an almost unbearable "intense, burning, sticking sensation." "You can't stop picking," said one, describing the urge as "almost an obsession [...] You feel the sensation of something that's trying to come out of your skin. You've just got to get in there. And there's this sense of incredible release when you get something out." *Guardian*, 7 May 2011.

Unsurprisingly, sufferers tend to be covered in scabs. Sometimes these are presented as evidence of the disease itself, rather than of the patients' own actions. Patients may also collect the strange, coloured fibres as evidence (known by doctors as the 'matchbox sign.')

The medical establishment generally regards Morgellons as a psychological condition, although some recent studies have indicated that it may be connected to Lyme's Disease, and to bovine digital dermatitis



"Morgellons is an unpredictable killer, a terrorist disease."

(BDD). See **FT167:19, 196:19, 323:14.**

The sensation that insects are crawling on or burrowing beneath one's skin is known as formication, and is sometimes associated with drug or alcohol abuse. It may occur as a symptom of opiate and alcohol withdrawal in addicts, or as a side-effect of amphetamine or cocaine intoxication. This strange delusion has been alluded to by both William S Burroughs and Philip K Dick. 'Coke bugs' make an appearance in Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* (1959): "One morning you wake up and take a

speed ball [a mixture of heroin and cocaine], and feel bugs under your skin."

And later: "The boy stirred and scratched the back of his neck: 'Something bit me, Joe. What kinda creep joint you run here.' 'Coke bugs, kid,' Joe said, holding eggs up to the light."

A Scanner Darkly (1977) is Dick's tragi-comic novel of drug paranoia. A house full of stoners gradually sink into psychosis, one of whom is both an undercover narcotics agent and a dope fiend. Its first paragraph reads as follows: "Once a guy stood all day shaking bugs from his hair. The doctor told him there were no bugs in his hair. After he had taken a shower for eight hours, standing under hot water hour after hour suffering the pain of the bugs, he got out and dried himself, and he still had bugs in his hair; in fact, he had bugs all over him. A month later he had bugs in his lungs."

However, formication may also occur in people who have no drug or alcohol problems; in such cases, doctors or psychiatrists often make a diagnosis of delusional parasitosis (aka Ekbom's syndrome, named for the Swedish neurologist Karl-Axel Ekbom, who first identified the condition in 1937).

In recent years, singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell has spoken of suffering from a variety of health problems, including 'Morgellons disease'. This, she told the *Los Angeles Times* in 2010, is "a weird, incurable disease that seems like it's from outer space... Fibres in a variety of colours protrude out of my skin like mushrooms after a rainstorm: they cannot be identified as animal, vegetable or mineral. Morgellons is a slow, unpredictable killer, a terrorist disease. It will blow up one of your organs, leaving you in bed for a year."

She explained how "the Morgellons is always diagnosed as 'delusion of parasites' and they send you to a psychiatrist". But she affirmed her desire to use her celebrity status to "battle for Morgellons sufferers to receive the credibility that's owed to them." *Independent*, 24 April 2010; *D. Telegraph*, 2 April, *S. Telegraph*, 5 April 2015.

A vigorous lobbying campaign by US Morgellons advocates prompted serious medical research into the condition; but investigations by both the Mayo Clinic and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) could find no infectious agent or environmental factor responsible for the illness, concluding that the vast majority of patients were suffering from a combination of dermatitis and delusional parasitosis. A CDC task force examined 115 people from northern California with Morgellons-type symptoms. Most were middle-aged Caucasian women. Hair samples taken from 50 per cent of the study group tested positive for one or more commonly abused drugs. Another 30 per cent had a history of depression. Most of the



sores and lesions seemed to be the result of repeated scratching and picking.

As for the fibres presented by patients as evidence, these were found to be either cotton or other materials used in the manufacture of clothing, or, more disturbingly, nerve fibres which some patients had apparently excavated from beneath their skin. Accordingly, the CDC concluded that these symptoms were consistent with delusional parasitosis.

However, more recent research is beginning to suggest that a psychological explanation is not the whole story. Dr Anne Louise Oaklander is an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and perhaps the only neurologist to specialise in itch. She argues that some Morgellons patients may have developed nerve disorders causing symptoms of severe itching, pointing out that the itch reflex may be a neurological symptom in patients with shingles, sciatica, spinal cord tumours or lesions. "Unfortunately," she says, "what can happen is a dermatologist fails to find an explanation and jumps to a psychiatric one." *Guardian*, 7 May, *D.Telegraph*, 11 July 2011; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July 2015.

A 2012 study (MJ Middelveen, EH Rasmussen, DG Kahn, RB Stricker, (2012): 'Morgellons Disease: A Chemical and Light Microscopic Study' *Journal of Clinical & Experimental Dermatology Research* vol.3:1) demonstrated the Morgellon filaments to be composed of the cellular proteins keratin and collagen, and not textile fibres. Keratin is a fibrous structural protein that forms the key element in our hair and fingernails, whilst collagen, another structural protein, gives elasticity and strength to our skin.

The authors of the study theorised that these proteins are overproduced in response to a type of bacterial infection. There are similarities between Morgellons and bovine digital dermatitis (BDD), which is associated with spirochete bacteria. Spirochetes are themselves known to be behind Lyme's disease, whose symptoms include joint pain and



ABOVE: Morgellons sufferers (whose number includes musician Joni Mitchell, pictured at left) report not just unbearable itching but also bizarre filaments emerging from their sores.

neurological disorders.

Aside from the intense itching and the alleged eruption of fibres, symptoms of Morgellons include joint or muscle pain, lethargy, fatigue and an inability to concentrate. This has led to comparisons being made with chronic fatigue syndrome, ME, and Gulf War Syndrome. Sufferers of these conditions insist that a physical cause (or causes) is responsible, which they hope may one day be identified, for at least two reasons: firstly, such a discovery could (in theory at least) lead to a cure; and secondly, as long as these mysterious illnesses continue to be understood as psychosomatic in nature, a large section of the public (and the medical community) will regard patients less sympathetically than they might do if a viral or bacterial infection, parasitic infestation, or some other organic agent had been identified as the source of the illness.

Those who view Morgellons as a delusional belief system rather than a disease of organic origin regard it as a 21st century manifestation of mass hysteria, akin to the Salem mass panic, or more properly, a "mass

psychogenic illness". In some cases, Internet-driven conspiracy subcultures have added to the spread of Morgellons awareness. Chemtrails, nanotechnology, and environmental pollutants have all been linked to the condition. Some blame a genetically modified organism, artificially created in a laboratory. Others, noting the presence of *Agrobacterium* in some Morgellons lesions, blame GM crops. *Agrobacterium*, a genus of bacterium used commercially to produce genetically modified plants, is also known to cause tumours in plants. *Metro*, *New Scientist*, 12 Nov 2007.

Like chronic fatigue syndrome, it seems likely that the disease is not one that has a single cause, but is, rather, a collection of symptoms – some of psychological origin, others not – that have been gathered together under the label Morgellons.

Medical sociologist Robert Bartholomew has undertaken a study of the Morgellons phenomenon and believes four contributory factors are at work. Firstly, he says, many patients are suffering from delusional parasitosis. A second group may have the disorder cutaneous dysaesthesia, in which feelings of discomfort or even pain are induced when the skin is subjected to touch by normal stimuli. A third group appear to have sores from Lyme disease, and a fourth group are experiencing a wide array of disparate symptoms that have

been lumped together under the single label of Morgellons. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July 2015.

Bartholomew noted that only after the online Morgellons Research Forum was set up in 2004 did word begin to spread, with exponentially increasing numbers of people diagnosing themselves and then describing their illness on the Web. "It seems to be a socially transmitted disease over the Internet," he argued, "and that's the fascinating phenomenon here." *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Nov 2006.

In the case of Morgellons, Bartholomew regards the Web as an incubator for mass delusion. Indeed, one may conceive of Morgellons as the first Internet virus to have crossed over to the real world, propelled by the well-known tendency (and bane of doctors) of patients self-diagnosing by means of Google. Reflex contagion, the phenomenon of coughing or yawning after having observed other people doing so, is also a factor. *Sunday Age (Melbourne)*, 25 Oct 2009.

By contrast, a recent article (Marianne J Middelveen, Melissa C Fesler, Raphael B Stricker (2018): 'History of Morgellons disease: from delusion to definition' *Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigational Dermatology* vol.11, pp71-90) argues that patients who simply report the creeping and crawling sensation but who do not otherwise express delusions that their bodies are infested with insects should not be diagnosed with delusional parasitosis. Such sensations are consistent with formication associated with a variety of medical conditions (diabetes, chronic infections, menopause etc.) And the article points out that since Lyme's Disease and other tick-borne diseases are sometimes accompanied by mental illness, Morgellons patients displaying delusional beliefs may also be suffering from a disease of physical origin.

So the debate about Morgellons amongst the medical profession looks set to continue for the foreseeable future. One thing is certain, however; whatever its cause or causes, for Morgellons sufferers, the torment is all too real.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

English-speaking footballers start spouting French and Spanish; plus Flat Earthers and Aum executions



ABOVE LEFT: The six Aum cultists executed on 27 July (clockwise from top left): Yasuo Hayashi, Kazuaki Okazaki, Masato Yokoyama, Toru Toyoda, Satoru Hashimoto and Kenichi Hirose. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Sixteen-year-old American goalie Reuben Nsemoh was in a coma for three days after being kicked in the head; he woke up able to speak fluent Spanish.

AUM SHINRIKYO [FT84:9]



On 27 July, the last six of 13 Aum Shinrikyo cultists on death row in Japan were executed. The

doomsday cult, whose name means ‘Supreme Truth’, hit world headlines on 20 March 1995. On that day, shortly before 8am, five cultists, using the sharpened tips of their umbrellas, punctured plastic bags containing liquid sarin – a nerve agent invented by the Nazis – on five crowded trains on the Tokyo subway during the rush hour before fleeing. The attack killed 13 people and injured at least 5,800, some permanently.

The cult, founded in 1987, mixed Buddhist and Hindu meditation with Christian and apocalyptic teachings. It believed the world was about to end in a nuclear attack by the US, and outsiders would go to Hell unless they were killed by cult members. It boasted more than 10,000 followers in Japan and an estimated 30,000 in Russia. The subway attack was styled as a “holy attempt to elevate the doomed souls of this world to a higher spiritual stage”. In the ensuing raid on the cult’s compound near Mount Fuji, 2,000 police officers approached with a canary in a cage. In subsequent months,

cultists mounted a series of failed attacks in various railway stations involving hydrogen cyanide. Two months after the raid, Chizuo Matsumoto, the cult’s leader who went by the name Shoko Asahara, was discovered at the cult’s compound, hiding in a tiny space concealed behind a wall, along with piles of cash and a sleeping bag.

Asahara and his lieutenants were also accused of several other murders and an earlier sarin gas attack in 1994, which killed eight people and left 600 injured. In 2004, Asahara was convicted of 27 killings over six years. He was finally hanged on 6 July this year, along with six other cultists. The podgy ex-yoga teacher and acupuncture therapist, who was visually impaired, was an avid collector of pubic hair, harvested from some of the 30 or 40 women followers who slept with him. He claimed to be the reincarnation of Shiva and to have supernatural powers, including the ability to levitate. He also claimed to have travelled forward in time to 2006 and talked to people about what World War III had been like.

Aum went underground and is a designated terror group in many countries including the US. It still has followers in Japan

and elsewhere. *Eve. Standard*, 6 July; *Irish Times*, *NY Times*, *Washington Post*, *D.Express*, *D.Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *D.Mirror*, 7 July; [AP] 27 July 2018.

TWISTED TONGUES [FT299:8]



• O’Neal Mahmoud, a three-year-old from an Arabic-speaking Druze family in the Golan Heights, has amazed doctors with his ability to speak English with a British accent without ever having been exposed to the foreign language. Named after legendary basketball player Shaquille O’Neal, the boy didn’t speak at all until he was two. Then he started making unintelligible noises, and speaking fluent English, using phrases like “My dear” and “Oh my goodness”, which are hardly ever used in his home village, near the Druze town of Majdal Shams, in northern Israel.

Stranger still is the fact that O’Neal doesn’t actually know the Arabic equivalents of the English words he speaks. A speech therapist and clinical linguist who examined him concluded that his level of English was that of a three-year-old who grew up in an Anglophone family, while his level of Arabic was far below that. “I don’t understand every

word, and sometimes I tell him, ‘Yes, okay’ and I don’t understand what he’s saying,” said O’Neal’s grandfather, Yahya Shams. The boy’s parents, neither of whom speak English, claim that he has never travelled abroad, and hasn’t been watching much English television. Still, he is somehow able to utter complicated words like “motorcycle”, “rectangle” or “waterfall”, without even knowing their Arabic equivalents.

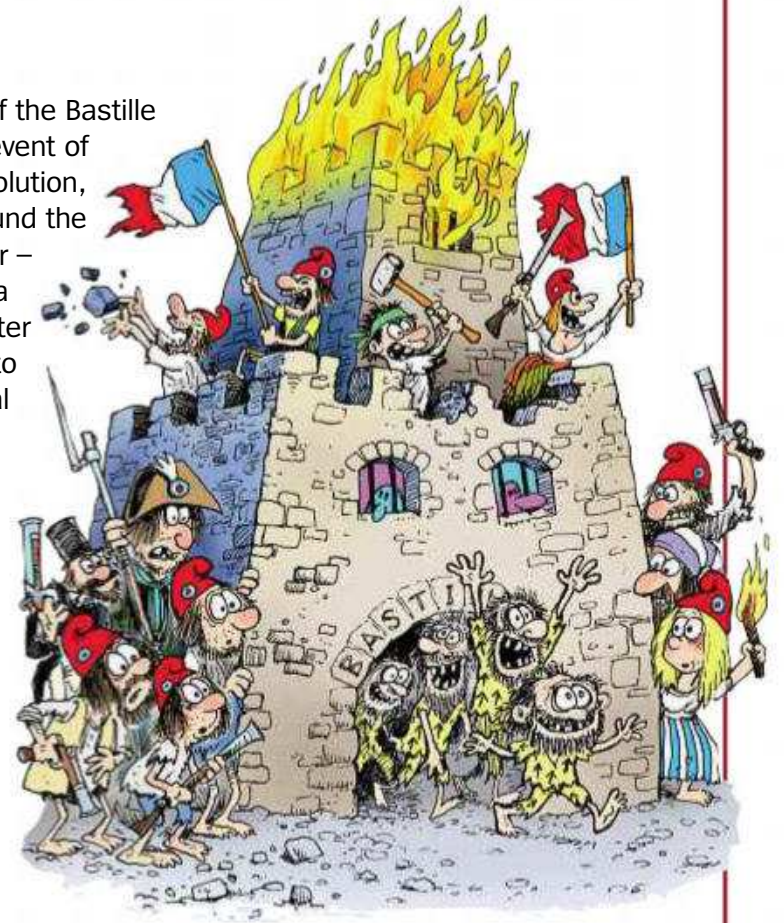
Irit Holman, who works as a nurse, couldn’t offer reincarnation – a central tenet of Druze faith – as an explanation, but she questioned why, if he simply had an amazing memory and fantastic comprehension skills, he hadn’t mastered Arabic first. Experts suggested that it could be a case of xenoglossia (or xenolalia), a mysterious phenomenon where a person is able to speak a language that they could not have acquired through natural means. However, evidence of xenoglossia is purely anecdotal. *oddity central*, 5 June 2018.

• Rory Curtis (25) of Redditch, Worcestershire, awoke from a six-day coma speaking fluent French. He had suffered serious injuries when the car he was driving hit a lorry in torrential

229: THE BASTILLE

The myth

The Storming of the Bastille – emblematic event of the French Revolution, celebrated around the world every year – was, in reality, a damp squib. After all that bother to free the political prisoners from their tyrannical bondage... there weren't any political prisoners there.



The “truth”

There have been (in the English-speaking world, at least) two successive Bastille myths. When I was a young sans-culotte, the story went that the ancient fortress was where the old regime incarcerated its dissidents. Once the mob had heroically overcome the Bastille's armed defenders and liberated the people's tribunes, the Revolution could begin in earnest. Later, we all came to learn that on 14 July 1789, when the furious masses finally gained entrance to the prison, they were nonplussed and somewhat embarrassed to discover that it only contained seven inmates: four forgers, two “lunatics,” and one “deviant.” So, those silly French have based their foundation myth on something that never really happened. In fact, neither version is true, simply because prisoners were never what the storming was about. Though no longer of much practical importance, the Bastille, with its bloody history, remained a visible symbol of a hated regime, and thus its capture a visible symbol of change. More immediately, it was being used to store ammunition, which the rebels needed to secure for their own purposes and to prevent it falling into reactionary hands. At some point, negotiations for a peaceful surrender broke down, the mob advanced, and scores of demonstrators died.

Sources

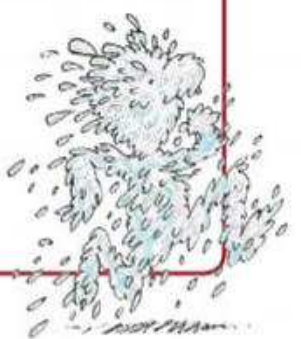
The day the Bastille fell by Douglas Liversidge (Franklin Watts, 1972); www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/5-myths-about-the-french-revolution/2015/07/09/6f27c6f0-25af-11e5-b72c-2b7d516e1e0e_story.html?utm_term=.8a94af3caca0; <https://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/fall-of-the-bastille/>

Disclaimer

Many details of that day's events remain subject to dispute and confusion, so feel free to storm the letters page with any corrections.

Mythchaser

A gym-bound reader has heard that it's a myth that sweating heavily while exercising is a sign of lack of fitness. For (unspecified) personal reasons, she'd love to be told this is true; can anyone help?



rain before six cars crashed into the side of him in August 2012. Firefighters took 40 minutes to free him from the wreckage on the M42 at Tamworth, Staffordshire, before he was airlifted to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital. He had a multifocal intracranial brain haemorrhage, which meant blood was leaking into his brain from a burst blood vessel. When he came round after six days in a coma, he spoke to nurses in fluent French, although he had not studied the language since he was 14. “I didn't even do French at GCSE,” he said. “I was sitting there spouting a foreign language from my hospital bed acting all French in their sort of arrogant yet sophisticated way. It wasn't me at all. I wasn't really that good at it at school, so I don't know how my brain has managed to do what it has.” His mother Vera (57) said: “All of a sudden he wakes up and he's speaking French. This nurse was from Africa and spoke French. She asked us what side of the family was from France, as his accent was so good. Well I told her, none of us. She didn't believe it.”

The promising semi-professional footballer, who retrained as a barber after the accident, was also convinced he was Matthew McConaughey (45), star of *Dallas Buyers Club*. “When I went to the toilet I looked in the mirror and was shocked because I didn't look like him,” he said. “Then over time it clicked and I thought, ‘He is an actor, what am I on about?’ But at times I was in hospital thinking I can't wait to get out of here and back to filming movies... The accident changed my outlook on life. I can't leave the house now without telling everyone I love them and giving them a hug.” *D.Telegraph, Times, 23 Dec 2014.*

- After suffering a stroke, an elderly Chinese woman from Hunan awoke from a two-week coma able to speak only English. Liu Jaiyu (94), a former English teacher who hadn't spoken the language for more than 30 years, found herself no longer able to speak Chinese after parts of her brain

relating to native language were damaged by a cerebral infarction. Television pictures show her in bed, answering simple questions in English, obliging the nursing staff to brush up on their language skills. Experts said that the complex Chinese language requires the use of both parts of the brain, while English only uses one side. *BBC News, 3 Feb; Irish D.Mirror, 4 Feb 2015.*

- Reuben Nsemoh (16), goalkeeper at Brookwood High School in Georgia, was kicked in the head diving for a loose ball in the Fall of 2016, his third concussion. He stopped breathing and was in a coma for three days. When he woke up, he couldn't speak English, but he was able to speak fluent Spanish, a language he couldn't speak before. As his ability to speak English returned, his Spanish fluency faded, although he continued to speak Spanish. *Fox News, 24 Oct 2016.*

FLAT EARTH BULLETIN [FT338:20-21, 368:10]



In August, following the Flat Earth Convention in Birmingham last April, another group of 250 believers gathered in West Edmonton Mall's Fantasyland Hotel in Canada to denounce the globalist hoax. Prominent Flat Earther Mark Sargent answered audience questions. He believes “the conspiracy” began in 1956, at the dawn of the “space race”. Scientists can't reveal the truth because of the upheaval it would cause. “By the time they figured it out... the industrialised world, the cement was already cast,” he said. “If some scientist revealed it tomorrow on CNN, or whatever, and it was broadcast that the Earth is not [round] – there's potential for some real shock waves, some real upheaval. The first one is academic – literally in every university in every country, astrophysics and astronomy would have to be shut down overnight. Those would not reopen.” How cement figures in all this is a bit of a puzzle. *Yahoo News UK, 14 Aug 2018.*

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to the founder of the International UFO bureau, a legend of the American sideshows, and an early researcher of REM sleep



HAYDEN HEWES

had a degree in aeronautical and space engineering. He was a talent agent with Oklahoma Casting, taught classes on modelling, and had bit parts in several movies. Starting in the 1950s, he researched unexplained phenomena, published several books and magazine articles on the subject, and gave talks on television and radio. In 1957 he founded the International UFO Bureau, and in July 1972, as director of the Sasquatch Investigations of Mid-America, he was involved in the media frenzy following sightings of a huge Bigfoot-like creature seen along the River Road and at the foot of Marzolf Hill, Louisiana, Missouri – the Missouri Monster, Momo for short – reported in these pages by Colin Bord (FT10:11) and Loren Coleman (FT40:45). “What impressed me was the willingness of people to talk to us,” said Hewes. “Normally people are reluctant to talk about these things. This was not just one person spitting in a can, saying ‘Yes sir, I saw it right over there’. These were good quality people who were enthusiastic about what was going on.”

Hewes said his investigations suggested there were families of nocturnal Bigfoot creatures that continuously migrate across the nation from the Pacific Northwest to the southeast. “The path begins around Oregon and Washington State,” he said. “It crosses Oklahoma around the first week of September, then finishes in Florida.”

A UPI report on 24 May 1973 stated that Hewes, as director of the International UFO Bureau, believed a grave

in Aurora, Texas, contained a dead alien, “and will go to court if necessary to open the grave”. He was quoted as saying: “After checking the grave with metal detectors and gathering facts for three months, we are certain as we can be at this point [that] he was the pilot of a UFO which reportedly exploded atop a well on Judge J.S. Proctor’s place, April 19, 1897.” In the event, no ufonaut was unearthed.

In 1973 Hewes and fellow researcher Brad Steiger (obit FT370:30-31) were approached by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Neddels, “the mysterious two, Bo and Peep”, who wished to publicise that death could be overcome; “their physical bodies would rise in full view of anyone when the aliens came,” as Hewes put it. In 1997 Bo and Peep gained global notoriety for organising the Heaven’s Gate mass suicide following the approach of comet Hale Bopp [see FT96:15, 100:35-41]. Hewes wrote *The Aliens* (1970) with Hal Crawford, and worked with Brad Steiger to produce *UFO Missionaries Extraordinary* (1976) and *Inside Heaven’s Gate: The UFO Cult Leaders Tell Their Own Story in Their*

Own Words (1997). Hewes also spoke about Heaven’s Gate for a 2008 *National Geographic* documentary, *The Final Report*.

Hayden Cooper Hewes, paranormal researcher, born Cape Girardeau, Missouri 29 Dec 1943; died 13 Sept 2017, aged 73. (Thanks to Loren Coleman for data)

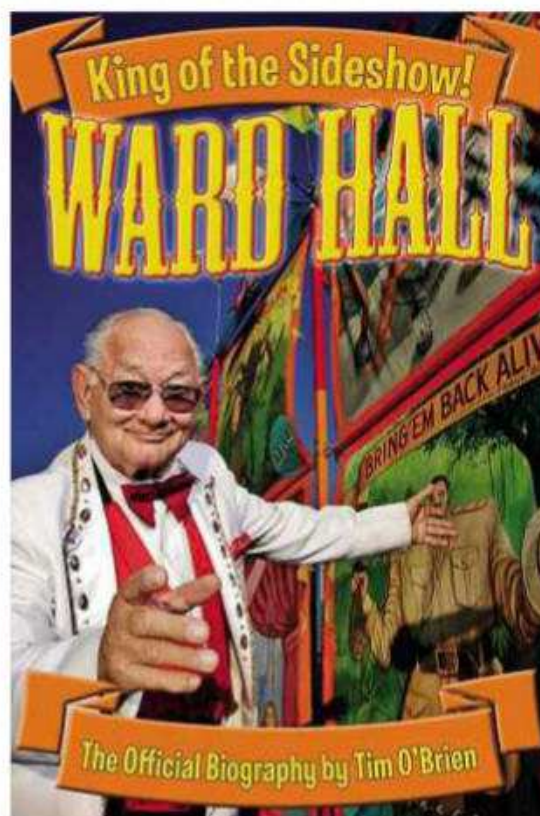
WARD HALL

Known as “the King of the Sideshow”, Ward Hall saw his first circus when he was eight and spent his entire career in the world of circuses, carnivals and travelling shows. He took it upon himself to keep alive the tradition of freak sideshows. Before running his own show, he learned the business from the bottom up – magic, sword-swallowing, fire-eating, entering the lions’ cage – and worked throughout the US and Mexico. In 1950, with Harry Leonard, he opened his “World of Wonders”, featuring acts such as the Alligator-Skinned Man (who had the skin condition ichthyosis), and often appearing himself as a magician or ventriloquist. He was fighting the tide

of changing sensibilities, although he argued he was providing a living for people otherwise rejected by society. In 1972 he took on the state of Florida, which had prohibited the exhibition of “any crippled or physically distorted, malformed or disfigured person”. He won his case, arguing that the law meant that performers like Sealo the Seal Boy, one of the plaintiffs, who had the congenital condition phocomelia, were unable to earn a living.

In 1974 Ringling-Barnum revived their sideshow after many years’ absence; Hall and his partner Chris Christ provided it. Hall engaged an artist in Tampa, Florida, to create a “two-headed girl” illusion, and had the artist destroy the moulds to prevent imitations. In the mid-1970s Hall and Christ had several shows running, as well as seaside wax museums. With fewer legitimate “freaks” available, they relied on illusion acts and the likes of sword-swallowers, knife-throwers, the tattooed and the fat.

They sold up in 2004, but returned several times before retiring to Gibsonton, Florida, Hall’s home since 1967, where it is still possible to spot the occasional fat lady, snake boy or tattooed man. It was once the home of Percilla the Monkey Girl, the Anatomical Wonder, and the Lobster Boy. At one time, Gibsonton post office was the only one with a counter for dwarfs. Today, mused Hall, “Tattooed ladies and fat men walk the aisles of Walmart – it is almost impossible to





shock anyone nowadays.”

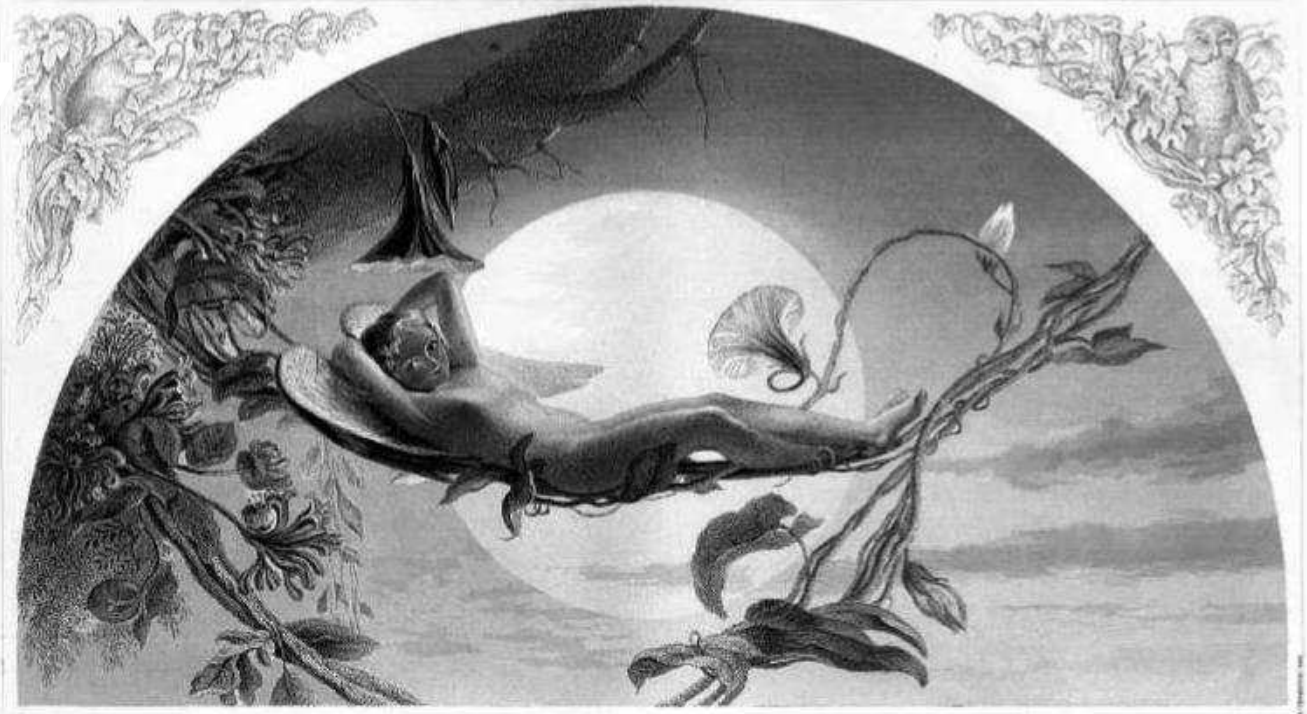
Ward Hall, US showman,
born Trenton, Nebraska 21
June 1930; died Sun City,
Florida 31 Aug 2018, aged 88.

MICHEL JOUVET

Jouvet was one of the first researchers to describe Rapid Eye Movement sleep, the crucial stage when the brain dreams and processes experiences. REM sleep was discovered by Eugene Aserinsky and Nathaniel Kleitman at the University of Chicago in 1953, but it was Jouvet, in the early 1960s at the University Claude Bernard in Lyon, who mapped out the brain structures that generate it. He compared the discovery of REM sleep to finding “a new continent in the brain”. He also coined the alternative term “paradoxical sleep”, because the brain is alert and thrumming with electrical activity – as if awake – while the body is asleep and the muscles limp or “atonic” (meaning an absence of muscle tone). The muscles of the eye, however, periodically flit from side to side. REM sleep is found in all warm-blooded mammals and birds. Jouvet discovered it initially in cats, and later studied penguins, which stay awake for long periods during the breeding season.

In 1959 Jouvet published the first paper in the medical literature to define brain death. He subsequently classified the two cycles of sleep, telencephalic (or slow wave) and rhombencephalic (or paradoxical). It was then that he identified the pons as the brain structure in cats that paralysed the muscles during paradoxical sleep. REM sleep, he believed, functioned as “a periodic reinforcement process aimed at maintaining the genetic basis of personality.”

Michel Valentin Jouvet,
dream researcher, born Lons-
le-Saunier, Jura 16 Nov 1925;
died Villeurbanne, France 3 Oct
2017, age 91.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

UNSHARED EXPERIENCE

A favourite, over the past 50 years, for fortune writers, has been the comparison of fairy-lore with alien-lore. There is the idea that aliens today act much as fairies were said to in the past. After all, goes the argument, both aliens and fairies are associated with night and strange lights; both are superior beings bringing curses or blessings; both meddle (sometimes sexually) with their human pets; both are often seen flying...

I have my doubts about associating fairies and aliens: I have a visceral and almost certainly unfair dislike of greys and their ilk. But I've become more open to the fairy-alien coupling reading, in the last years, the works of Josh Cutchin. Josh has built his reputation on comparing similar strands in alien- and fairy-lore (with some brief excursions into sasquatch territory). In previous outings he has dealt with food (see FT332:40-47), with smells (FT350:32-37), and he has now, with his new book, *Thieves in the Night: A Brief History of Supernatural Child Abductions*, moved on to paranormal child abuse. However, reading *Thieves* I was struck forcefully by one of the most important differences between alien experiences today and fairy experiences in the past. When, 200 years ago, the fey ‘changed’ a child, communities shared the opinion that little Johnny had turned into a fairy. In some of the more disturbing cases,

communities got involved with ‘curing’ Johnny. There are cases from, say, 19th-century Ireland where fairy children were beaten and, in one horrific case, burnt to death. When we look at alien encounters with children in 2018, the encounter is often not shared at all: it is typically the experience of one individual (sometimes ‘recalled’ through hypnotism). At best a family or intimate friends share the

consensus that ‘something’ is happening or has happened to one of their number. This divide is not about fairies and aliens, of course. This switch from communal to individual beliefs runs right through our century. It is nothing less than the final shattering of the form of social organisation handed down from the Neolithic Revolution.

We see something very similar in other supernatural realms. In 19th-century England, ghosts were a common possession of communities. They had names,

like ‘Old Peggy’, ‘Yellow Trousers’, ‘Horton Boggart’. A score of neighbours would come together to listen to ghost stories. Hundreds would gather at houses at night if rumours of a spirit in a residence started up: I have referred elsewhere to these ‘ghost riots’ in the streets of Victorian Manchester and London (see also FT312:76 for a contemporary account of the Manchester events). The switch from the public to the private has naturally had massive consequences for how fortune was relayed and lived.

Simon Young’s new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now from Gibson Square

THE SWITCH
FROM
COMMUNAL TO
INDIVIDUAL
BELIEFS RUNS
RIGHT THROUGH
OUR CENTURY



Now you see them, now you don't

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

TRUMP TRUMPS THE TRUMPED-UP

One of the more appealing aspects of Donald Trump's campaign for the US presidency was that he had nothing to say, let alone promise, on the matter of UFOs. In this as in so many other ways he differed from previous presidential candidates (including Mrs Clinton) who'd always promised to reveal all once in power. And, much to the delight of the Conspiratorium, the winners never did once they'd settled into the Oval Office. Trump's mind was more on civil-engineering projects, such as building walls and draining swamps. So taken aback by his approach to politics and statesmanship in general were the media that (as far as I know) no journo ever asked his opinion about UFOs and/or what he'd tell the world about them if he won the election. Perhaps they thought the question wasn't worth asking, merely on the grounds that none of the half-witted hacks ever thought he'd win. Which was an opportunity missed, since any answer could have been spun to 'prove' the man was unhinged and unsuitable, &c. &c. Anyway, since The Donald failed to approach the UFOs, they have come to him instead. Sort of. It's still more than the mountain did for Mahomet.

Early in September, the ever-vigilant Mail Online picked up a story from the UFO Stalker website. Someone had put up a post: his niece had been puzzled by a photo she'd taken while staying at Turnberry – once a flagship of British Railways' hotel chain, now part of the Trump property empire. I have a nostalgic fondness for the old British Transport Hotels (BTH), as I used to write their advertising in another wifetime, so the whiskers perked. The picture, shot from inside the niece's room, indeed showed four disc-shaped things in the sky (see above). "Can you help me identify these UFOs? Any ideas?" asked the poster.

Cue the sound of cavalry arriving in the nick of time, in the shape of Eric Trump, son of The Donald and now in charge of his business interests. Tweeted Trump Junior: "I do love the Mail Online however I sincerely hope they realize that this is simply the reflection of the ceiling lights on the glass (the picture was taken from inside)." Well spotted, Mr Trump: it's good to know you know the inside of that fine hotel as well as you do the links. Of course, it may be no help to the Trump enterprise in general that the family has joined the demonic ranks of UFO debunkers, but that's not the point. Which



LEFT: Saucers over Trump Turnberry... or ceiling lights reflected in a window?

the Pentagon, said it was, back in March: "to assess 'far-term foreign advanced aerospace threats [to] the United States'." She also referred to AATIP as an "advanced *aviation* programme". Which suggests that it had nothing to do with UFOs as such at all. And that wouldn't do for TTSAAS's and El Lizardo's purposes today. So that revelation remains in the dossier marked DODGY.

Elizondo has characteristically overclaimed the achievements of AATIP. At the MUFON Symposium this year he maintained that the programme had established five 'observables' about UFOs. These are: 1. instantaneous acceleration; 2. hypersonic velocity (Mach 5 and above); 3. low observability, aka stealth; 4. multimedium travel, i.e. the capacity to operate in space, in the atmosphere, and in the water; 5. positive lift, which seems to mean an anti-gravity capability.

Wow – what news is this? People have been claiming these qualities for UFOs for approaching seven decades, based on witness reports; which as we know can be wondrously inaccurate. No one's ever measured the hypersonic speed of a UFO, unless AATIP did, but Elizondo is keeping shtum.

Stealth and UFOs is a mass of contradictions. Now you see them, now you don't. In the earlier days of ufology, radar was supposed to interfere with UFOs' 'electromagnetic propulsion systems' (no evidence for them either). We're told they turn up on radar all the time, but also hear it still repeated that the eggheads in Hangar 18 reverse-engineered stealth technology from downed flying saucers. The 'observables' claimed as established by Elizondo are really 'reportables', and derive not from science or even respectable scientific theory, but from UFO legend. Small wonder then that the Pentagon decided there were, as Major Harris most diplomatically put it, "other, higher priority issues that merited funding and it was in the best interest of the DoD to make a change."

If you're interested, it's now too late to invest in TTAAS, as the share offer closed on 28 September. Curiously, the actual amount invested, once loudly touted on their homepage, seems rather hard to find on the TTSAAS website. Never mind. Someone will find it out sooner or later.

is, that the (non) UFOs *didn't set about The Donald himself*. Is he being protected by the aliens? Shouldn't someone ask Mrs Clinton about this? Any grist to the mill, eh?

INVISIBLE OBSERVABLES

The To The Stars Academy of Arts and Sciences (TTSAAS) continues to exercise its genius for low-grade paradox, producing reams of words that tell us nothing much really. Among its latest effusions is a 2009 letter from Senator Harry Reid pleading for the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) to be made secret, maybe even top secret. There is more than one way to interpret this document. It could be a sign that AATIP (prop. Luis 'El Lizardo' Elizondo) was really on to something extraordinary, maybe even alien, from which the prying eyes of the public should be protected. As there's been no evidence of that forthcoming – and the Pentagon closed the project because, essentially, it was a waste of money – that seems unlikely. Or trying to make AATIP secret might have been Reid's ham-fisted wheeze to keep his name out of the record – or perhaps, and perhaps more likely, that of his friend Robert Bigelow. But that fell on deaf ears. Or it may amount to a tacit admission that AATIP's purpose was exactly what Major Audricia Harris, spokesperson for



Do ufologists dream of alien sheep?

JENNY RANGLES falls ill, takes a trip to an alien world and discovers the secret of the Universe

One Sunday in mid-September I went to bed feeling fine. By the morning, I was sweating through what became several days of near delirium as a kidney infection struck. With my family over 1,000 miles away on a long-term vacation it was, at my age, a somewhat sobering experience to be alone through all of this. For 48 hours I hovered in a state of semi-consciousness and found myself playing Japanese puzzle games in my head. Later, I understood that this was my mind's way of distracting me, preventing me from succumbing to the fever ravaging my body. Eventually, drained of energy and with no food for several days, I was telling myself that the Universe thrived not on people or places but on complete ecosystems. I had no idea where this thought came from, other than my illness and sense of isolation, but I saw it as somehow hugely important and possibly the secret of the Universe. Obviously, I later realised that was a bit of an exaggeration!

I thought of my fascination with dinosaurs and a recent visit to an 'experience' playing on this human obsession. It used simulations of labs, robot dinosaurs and virtual reality landscapes to let us observe 'Dinosaurs in the Wild' via a fictional trip back through time. I decided that the reason dinosaurs had such appeal was because they represented an entire alien ecosystem that does not exist today. We cannot yet visit other worlds, where such collections of interacting species might be found, but dinosaurs provide a bridge between our own uniqueness and an entire planetary system that really had lived, thrived and died. In some way, this realisation eases our sense of loneliness, such as I was feeling when ill, and our desire as a species not to be entirely alone as an intelligence within the Universe. It represents our souls crying out for companionship, alongside the sobering reality that nothing lasts forever: not even us.

Suddenly, amidst these endless musings, I found myself on an alien world, so vivid that it was like watching a 3D movie; so clear that it felt like a lucid dream in which you are conscious throughout. I saw all kinds of strange beasts on land, sea and air, cavorting in front of my eyes, interlocked in harmony and telling me we are all united by invisible bonds of time and consciousness.

By this point a group of wolverine-like predators with huge fangs was attacking a flock of grazing timid, sheep-like creatures that resembled giant overgrown rugs on a rocky slope. However, like other animals in the ecosystem – such as flying things able to turn briefly invisible as they swooped down on prey – these sheep were no ordinary flock.



ABOVE: A caged creature photographed by the author at the 'Dinosaurs in the Wild' time tour.

Suddenly they literally exploded into a wall of fire. The flames spurted from their bodies, scattering the attacking wolverines and consuming those who were almost on top of the sheep. The predators burned, but the blazing sheep seemed unhurt by the fire emerging from their own bellies, as one by one they were able to scurry away.

The shock of this unexpected defence mechanism brought me out of the dream state and I gradually opened my eyes, free from this bizarre nightmare – except that I wasn't free. I saw the alien sheep were still there, right in front of my eyes. They were inside my bedroom, still flickering in orange flames. I was inside the alien ecosystem I had seen whilst asleep, but now wide awake. It took some moments for my mind to recover from this shock. I knew, of course, it was not happening. Yet the flaming sheep were right there. I opened and closed my eyes to remove what I knew had to be an illusion. It made no difference. The images remained.

Had I drifted back to sleep at this point, then this vivid memory would have been indelible and I would be certain I'd really had this alien 'vision', possibly triggered by the fever. However, I did not return to sleep and gradually the truth dawned. The images were not imagination. They were indeed present in the room. In fact, what I was seeing was a freak set of circumstances. I was staring at the brass door handle just a couple of feet in front of me at a very precise angle. The moment I moved my head to either side by a fraction, the illusion vanished. My blazing 'sheep' were of that precise shape thanks to a sodium streetlamp shining through misty rain and a slit in the blinds, hitting the metal at exactly the right angle to create this blurry perception. I must have seen this semi-consciously, drifted asleep thinking about the dinosaur ecosystem, and created the entire alien dream around this stimulus, then, minutes later, woke in the same spot to see the dream 'come true'. This was a perfect illustration of how perception and illusion live

side by side and direct our comprehension of what is 'real' – based both on what is in our subconscious and the external world.

A day or so later, now on the road to recovery, I suddenly recalled a case that now made sense. Roy Sandbach and I had been to see Jayne, a young woman living in a south Manchester suburb. Her mother was English, her father an American GI. Jayne worked as a nurse in a facility for terminally ill patients. She admitted it was a stressful but hugely rewarding career. She was a very gifted artist – her paintings were superb – and also had a very deep inner life, with out-of-body experiences and extremely real lucid dreams.

One night in January 1986 Jayne went to bed early, having a shift starting at dawn. Her body clock was all over the place and she was struggling to drift off. I could see the similarity with my recent fever experience, but re-read her account in full to remind me of her words.

"I suddenly felt a 'bump' as if falling to Earth. It was something I recall from my out-of-body experiences. Yet here I was not returning to my bed on Earth. I stood in an alien realm. I could look around me and see the purple sky. I could feel hot sand under my bare feet. *I was there.*"

She shared with us her sense of desolation as she described watching balls of light streak off into the sky. "I am being deserted," she said. Ultimately, she saw one of these balls of light cross the rugged landscape and fly into her abdomen, when she was overcome by a sense of peace and familiarity. She opened her eyes and smiled at us. This was not, to her, a vivid dream. It was a memory that, years later, she could not forget and considered as an actual event.

Two bedroom visions interpreted in very different ways: who is right and who is wrong?

What is clear is that reality is partly dependent upon circumstance directing us towards one resolution or another. I recall the many other times I have heard witnesses under regression hypnosis describe visions in which they have seen alien realms or strange creatures and have insisted to me these were real experiences. They have been convinced that on some level these alien visions were memory not fantasy. I could have interpreted what happened to me in much the same way and would have been left with, at the very least, unresolved questions had not chance brought a denouement to my story.

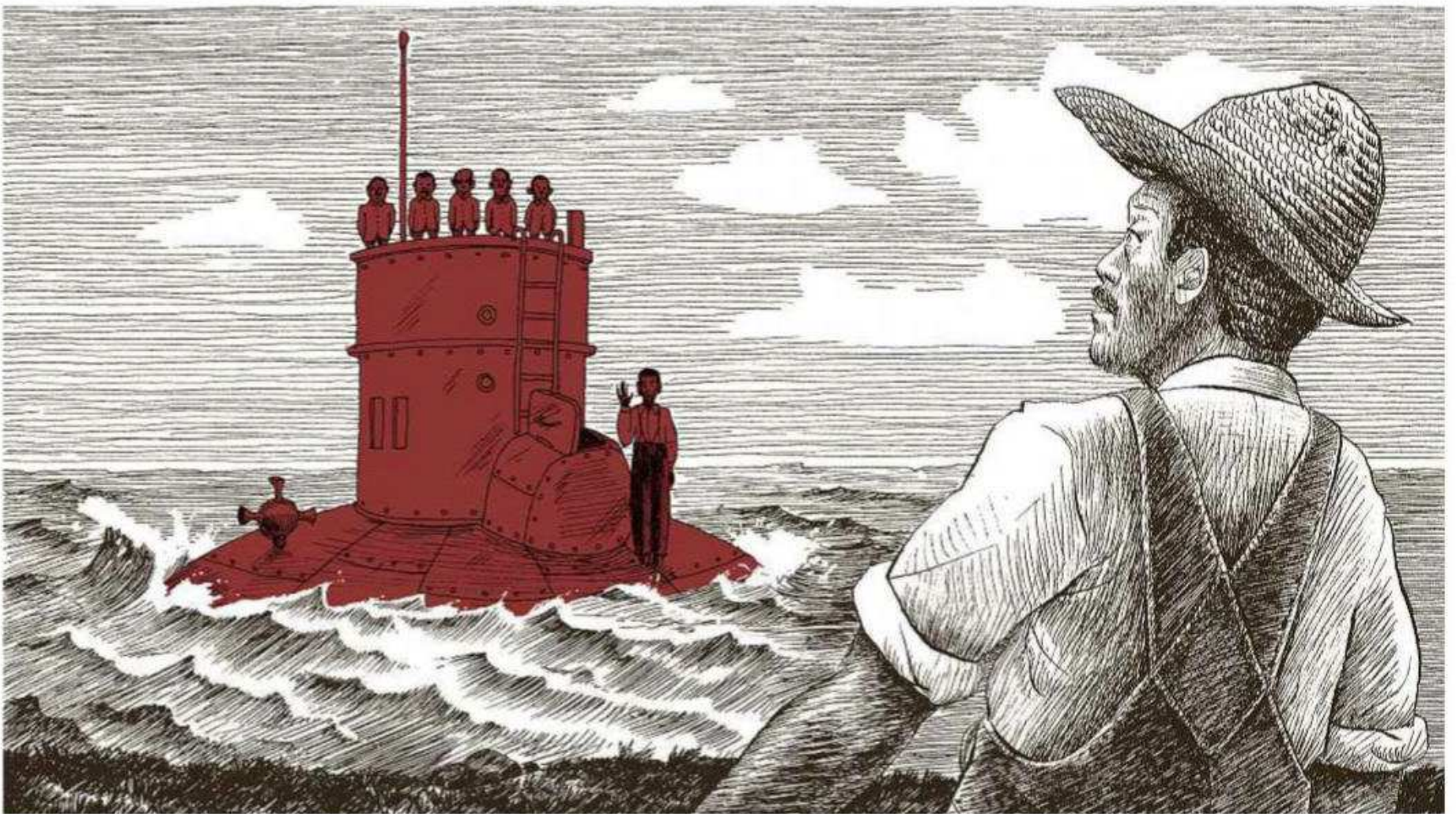
What, in these terms, is real? Is it what we see, or what we think we see? And are close encounters a cry from the soul of a lonely species seeking reassurance that we are not alone?

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

74 THE LITTLE BROWN MEN IN THE SUBMARINE AND OTHER AFRICAN AMERICAN ENCOUNTERS

THEO PAIJMANS uncovers accounts of the sometimes dangerous anomalies encountered by black Americans



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

Almost 20 years before Barney Hill was dragged aboard a UFO and became one of the first UFO abductees on record, another African American entered a 'strange craft'. On Saturday 4 April 1942, sharecropper Albert Turner was at work on the Harry Johnson farm east of Charleston, Missouri. The weather was fine, it was 10 o'clock in the morning and Turner was ploughing near the bank of the Mississippi. Suddenly, a grey object rose from the river where it was only 40ft (12m) deep and approached the sloping bank. "A negro man on deck waved to our friend to come aboard. He went," a local newspaper later reported. Once on board Turner met the man who had waved at him, but also "five little brown men". They escorted him through the ship, "or tin fish, or submersible or whatever it might have been", since what

"He described the interior, the locking device on the watertight door, the deck gun and a myriad of other things on the mysterious craft..."

the object exactly was, was not entirely clear.

Turner spent about half an hour aboard the strange craft, until he heard his boss's automobile approaching; this was his cue to leave the vessel and signalled an end to the surreal meeting. There's no way of knowing if this is how the events really occurred, but this is how the newspapers later told it: "Well, we have to go too, replied his hosts, so he went ashore. With a great churning of waters the grey craft slipped silently beneath the waves and disappeared."

Somehow, people learned of Turner's strange visit aboard that even stranger river craft. It irked the sheriff, who then questioned Turner at length. But he stubbornly stuck to his story, and it was an unusually detailed one: "He described the interior, the locking device on the watertight door, the deck gun and a myriad of other things on the mysterious craft." He was released and a report was submitted to the FBI and the Coast Guard. Then, Turner suddenly vanished. A newspaper noted that his disappearance

was "as complete as the evaporation of the alleged submarine".¹ But his vanishing was soon explained: he had been taken to St Louis for additional questioning by the FBI. Perhaps the agency was worried that the small submergible was Japanese, as some newspapers suggested. After all, America had been at war with Japan since it had attacked Pearl Harbor in December the previous year. During the attack, Japan had also used midget submarines, 41ft (12m) long vessels just large enough to hold two men. One was even put on display a few months after Turner's unlikely encounter.²

Turner faced a new round of sustained and lengthy grilling, not only by the FBI, but also by the Coast Guard, several Mississippi county officers and members of the State Highway Patrol. After a while, he broke

down. "He is said to have admitted finally that his story was a hoax," the newspapers reported. Case closed, the authorities concluded. The only question that remained, they said, was what to do with Turner.³ We will never know the answer to that, as he slid back into the murk of history, just as that strange, small craft had sunk beneath the waves, with its friendly fellow black man and its five chatty little humanoids. But why Turner would have invented such a fantastic sounding story in the first place, a very dangerous thing to do for any African American in those days of wartime, was never adequately addressed.

Just how dangerous an unexpected anomaly experience could be for any African American is illustrated in a letter sent to John Keel. In it, a Mrs J Mae Johnson from Illinois wrote about a mystery that had been haunting her family for 75 years, placing the incident around 1898. "My grandparents as a young married couple lived in rural Georgia... One moonlight night when my grandfather was en route to his home he decided to cut through a small tract of forest. He took a footpath winding through the forest, the path straightening out giving him a look ahead to an open clearing. There in the moonlight stood a young white woman. She was dressed in white. She was very beautiful. My grandfather told of the mixed emotions he had at this encounter. This was in the 1800s; a hysterical or frightened white woman could cause a humble black man to die a horrible death at the hands of a mob. What was she doing in a desolate district at this time of night, alone; how did she get there? My grandfather slowed up and much to his surprise by her actions she appeared to be waiting for him. She approached him smiling and

with her arms outstretched as if to embrace him. My grandfather backed away from her and would not allow her to touch him. Keeping the lady at a safe distance he fled back the way he had passed... Other black men of that time have told similar stories..."⁴

Mrs Johnson wasn't exaggerating. Take the case of an African American named Henry Wells, for instance, sadly one example out of many. In 1882 Wells was hanged outside the courthouse in Carrollton, Alabama, accused of violating a white woman, a crime he was innocent of. "Residents say you can still see his shadowy face in the window of the courthouse, although the glass has been replaced several times (see FT348:43). For years it was a crime for blacks to look at the 'ghost' of Henry Wells," a reporter wrote a century later.⁵

Anomalous phenomena on the other hand do not discriminate. Returning to the pages of the predominantly white US newspapers of the past, there are for instance early accounts of African Americans who saw mystery airships and other anomalies in the skies, often independently of any white observers, such as this one from 1917, North Carolina: "Vague rumors of mysterious aircraft, and huge balloons of the wartype are creating much talk among the colored people of Charlotte and reports may be heard of strange noises high in the air at night, said by the colored people to be the hum of the propeller of some unseen night prowler of the air, circling over these parts in quest of nobody knows just what." Witnesses stated that they had not only "heard the whizz and hum of the big motors of the aircraft, but that they have had fleeting glimpses of the dark objects, whirling through the skies at tremendous rates of speed during the night hours."⁶

And in 1945, three years

after Turner's unbelievable submarine story, Ambrose Floyd, an African American taxi driver from Wilson, North Carolina, was scared half to death when a "mystery ball of fire" suddenly fell from the sky on a country road near Greensboro: "It was around three o'clock in the morning, Floyd said. All of a sudden it was all light outside. I couldn't understand it. Then it got so cloudy for a moment that the headlights of my car couldn't see the road but a few feet ahead. Then all of a sudden this ball of fire came down in a field and as it hit the field what looked like a few feet from the road it just splattered all over."⁷

Another "mysterious ball of fire" came floating through a closed living room window in the house of Louise Matthews in Philadelphia in 1960, causing her hair to fall from the back of her head. The 51-year old African American woman related how she had been lying on her living room sofa when she looked up and saw "a large red ball of fire coming through the window. The ball of fire passed through the window and Venetian blind without harming either." The fireball left through a window in the dining room, making "a sizzling noise" as it passed through the house. "She said she felt a tingling sensation in the back of her head and started to rub it with her hand. Her hair was falling out in hunks and had turned brittle and felt like wire..."

If we remember the odd 'silencing' of USO contactee Albert Turner some 20 odd years before, the mystery of what befell Louise Matthews deepened when she claimed that afterwards "two mysterious men" had visited her to warn her not to talk about her experience. They took a sample of her hair and left with the cryptic message that "she might be contributing to 'saving of the

nation'"⁸. Things became even more complex when a radio-evangelist from Chicago claimed to see letters and numbers in the burn marks on her head. "He said the two mysterious men in black who visited Mrs Matthews and took her hair reminded him of the three men in black who visited a man who was writing a story about flying saucers..."⁹ Obviously, the radio-evangelist was referring to Albert K Bender, who had kick-started the Men In Black saga into being a few years before (obit: FT341:24). The radio-evangelist was probably Reverend Elder Charles Beck, an American gospel musician and evangelist who these days is considered as "one of the formative artists during the pre-war gospel blues and southern gospel eras".¹⁰ Reverend Beck wrote a few months later in *Search*, a paranormal magazine created by Ray Palmer after he left *Fate*: "...two mysterious men visited her home and told her not to talk to anyone about what had happened to her... Who the men were, where they came from or their reason for taking her hair, is an unsolved mystery".¹¹

Perhaps this added layer of weirdness was too much for the editorial taste of the *Afro American*, the newspaper that reported the case. What happened to Louise Matthews? Frustratingly, we don't know. The newspaper dropped the case and she also faded from the pages of history, just as Albert Turner and Ambrose Floyd and countless other African Americans had done before, and with them their stories of unbelievable encounters on lonely river banks, driving along deserted night roads or dreaming away in the comfort of their homes. But when accounts such as these emerge, they offer unique glimpses of the treasure trove of forteen experiences borne in the wake of the African Diaspora.

NOTES

1 'Submarine Bobs Up in Mississippi River And Takes Aboard A Negro Farmer Before Disappearing', *Enterprise Courier*, Charleston, MO, 5 April, 1942.

2 *Indianapolis Recorder*, Indianapolis, Marion County, IN, 14 Nov 1942.

3 'Jap Sub In River Is A

Closed Case', *Enterprise Courier*, Charleston, MO, 23 April, 1942; 'Negro's Story Is Under Investigation. Says He Was On Submarine In Mississippi River', *Macon Chronicle-Herald*, Macon, MO, 7 April 1942; 'Negro Says he Guest on River Sub', *Sikeston Standard*, Sikeston, MO, 10 April, 1942; 'Negro Said He Was Guest At Jap U-Boat', *The*

Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune, Chillicothe, MO, 9 April 1942.

4 John Keel, *Anomaly*, 10 Nov 1973, p201.

5 Eileen Hanson, 'Justice comes, slowly, for activists', *Baltimore Afro-American*, Baltimore, Maryland, 16 Nov 1982.

6 'The Colored People Are Seeing Visions', *Charlotte*

News, Charlotte, NC, 11 April 1917.

7 'Mystery Fire Ball Scares Wilson Negro', *Greensboro Daily News*, Greensboro, NC, 21 April 1945.

8 'Mildred O'Neill, 'Matron 'Scalped by mystery meteor', *The Afro American*, Baltimore, MD, 4 June 1960.

9 Mildred O'Neill, 'Mystery

grows in case of missing hair', *The Afro American*, Baltimore, MD, 18 June 1960.

10 WK McNeil, ed., *Encyclopaedia of American Gospel Music*, Routledge, 2005, p33.

11 Reverend Elder Charles Beck, 'Scalped By A Ball Of Fire', *Search*, Dec 1960, pp37-38.

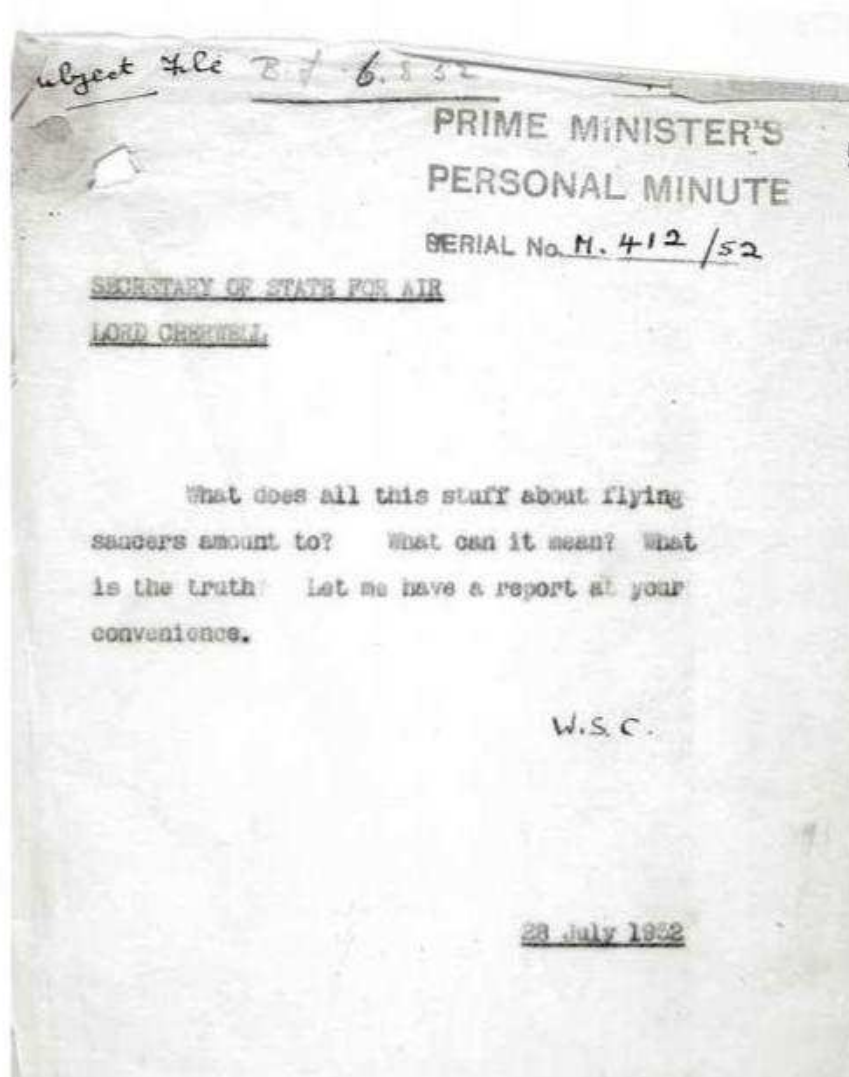
Churchill's Secret War

Millions of words have been written about Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), British prime minister and one of the most influential statesmen of the 20th century. **DAVID CLARKE** examines Churchill's curiosity about unexplained phenomena, a subject that recurred throughout his long career as army officer, politician, wartime leader, and writer.

Books and TV documentaries have picked apart his role as the inspirational wartime leader who inspired Britain when she stood alone against the Nazi war machine and later helped seal the Allied victory in World War II. Learned papers have debated his qualities as a politician, his wisdom and eloquence as an orator and his passion for science and technology. Even his love life and his lifelong struggle with his 'black dog' of depression have been placed under the literary and psychological microscope.

But far less attention has been devoted to Sir Winston Churchill's more esoteric interests that lay outside the strict boundaries of politics and international affairs. Anecdotes that provide insights into his passion for science fiction, his dalliance with spiritualism and his on-off fascination with fashionable or unusual ideas have, on occasion, received sensational media coverage. But no one has suggested that an interest in matters that we might define as fortean linked these interests together. I have found no evidence that Churchill read or was aware of Fort's writings, but his personal library certainly contained a copy of the 1953 book *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, inscribed by his cousin, Desmond Leslie, the aristocratic former RAF Spitfire pilot turned ufologist (see **FT225:40-47**).¹ Leslie borrowed heavily from Fort's material to compile the historical essay that was paired by his publisher with contactee George Adamski's story of his meeting with a being from Venus.

His alleged interest in spiritualism [see panel] has been examined by Malcolm Gaskill, who concludes that, in office, Churchill showed "all the constructive pragmatism one would expect from a man who counted bricklaying among his recreations".² His early adventures serving in the British Army in Sudan and later as a journalist with the *Morning Post* during the South African war led him to speak of the assistance of "that High Power which



LEFT: Churchill's famous 1952 memo to the Air Ministry asking "What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to?" **FACING PAGE:** Churchill giving his famous 'V for Victory' salute.

recorded conversations. As a schoolboy he predicted: "There will be a great crisis which I can't foresee the details of [but] I shall save England and the empire".³ President Richard Nixon described him as the only political leader in history "who has his own crystal ball", according to historian James C Humes in his book *Churchill: The Prophetic Statesman*.⁴

THE PRESCIENT POLITICIAN

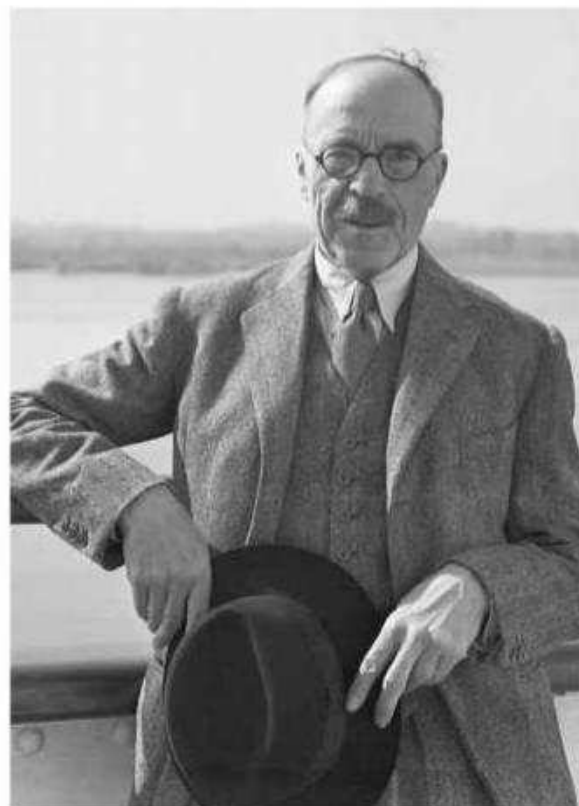
After his foreign adventures, Churchill returned to England in 1900 and became an MP at the age of 25. During WWI he promoted the use of tanks to break through the German trenches, but his powers of foresight failed him when, as First Lord of the Admiralty in the War Cabinet, his plan to break the stalemate on the Western Front by landing Allied troops on the Gallipoli peninsula ended in disaster. His resignation was followed by a long period in the political wilderness that saw him return to writing for a living. His journalism helped to pay for the upkeep of Chartwell, his country home in Kent. Always interested in everything, as a young man serving with the British Army in India he had devoured Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* and novels by HG Wells. Drawing upon the ideas he had toyed with in youth he used his contacts in the military and the scientific community as the source for a string of 'popular science' articles in magazines and newspapers.

In 1924, for instance, he anticipated the arrival of nuclear weapons in articles for the *Pall Mall Magazine*, asking presciently "might not a bomb no bigger than an orange be found to possess secret power to

He was described as the only leader "who has his own crystal ball"

interferes in the eternal sequences of causes and effects". In his book *My Early Life* he provides a breezy account of his escape from a Boer prison camp in 1899, after which he used a planchette pencil to help him divine his position and evade pursuers. As a result, he came to believe he was a man of destiny. Many sources highlight the gift for prophetic accuracy that weaves itself through his writings, speeches and





ABOVE LEFT: 'The Prof' – Frederick Alexander Lindemann, Viscount Cherwell. **ABOVE CENTRE:** RV Jones, one of Lindemann's young protégés who played a key role in Churchill's "war of science". **ABOVE RIGHT:** English chemist Sir Henry Tizard, who as Chief Scientific Advisor was behind the MoD's 'Flying Saucer Working Party'.

now call astrobiology. Churchill begins by stating that: "All living things of the type we know require water". He did not rule out the possibility that life could arise in other circumstances but accepted that "nothing in our present knowledge entitles us to make such a conclusion". He moves on to explore the factors required to produce what astronomers now call a 'Goldilocks zone' around stars, where a planet's temperature will not be too hot nor too cold to sustain the conditions likely to host life as we know it. In our own Solar System only the Earth, Mars and Venus fall into that zone. But when Churchill projected outside of our Solar System and grappled with the different planetary formation theories of his day, he concluded that, logically, extra-solar planets *must* exist. Decades before SETI, the Drake Equation or the discovery of the first exo-planet Churchill reached a carefully argued and persuasive conclusion: we are *probably* not alone in the Universe: "I am not sufficiently conceited to think that my Sun is the only one with a family of planets and, therefore, that our little Earth is unique," he wrote. "Once we admit that the other stars probably also have planets, at any rate a goodly proportion of them, it is more than likely that a large fraction of these will be the right size to keep on their surface water and, possibly, an atmosphere of some sort."⁷

WAR OF THE WIZARDS

Where and how did Churchill become aware of these ideas? His literary output reflects not only his fascination with hard science but also the influence of his earlier fascination with science fiction and, in particular, the writings of HG Wells. Research by the Cambridge historian Dr Richard Toye uncovered a long chain of correspondence between Churchill and Wells that he traced back to the turn of the century. The two men first met in 1902 and

Jones adopted a nuanced but sceptical attitude towards UFOs

kept in touch until Wells's death in 1946. Toye argues that Churchill's book title *The Gathering Storm* was borrowed consciously from Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. Churchill used it to describe the rise of Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany, whereas Wells employed it as a metaphor for the arrival of Martian invaders.⁸

But Wells's influence was waning by the time Churchill produced his essay on extraterrestrial life. The soon-to-be Prime Minister was the first modern leader to appoint a scientific advisor to serve in government. Long before his rise to power, Churchill took advice and counsel from his close friend Frederick Lindemann (1886-1957), professor of physics at Oxford University. The aristocratic scientist, nicknamed 'The Prof' by his admirers, was undoubtedly a brilliant man, even if his priggish manner created a certain amount of friction with academic rivals. The pre-war essay on ET life betrays Lindemann's growing influence and, with it, Churchill's growing confidence and ability to explain complex scientific concepts in a popular manner. Churchill's reputation as a clear-sighted politician grew partly as a result of briefings provided by his loyal friend not only on science but on many other subjects.

Churchill saw the Second World War as "a war of science... which could be won with new weapons" and one of Lindemann's

protégés, the physicist Professor RV Jones (1991-1997), played a key role in what became known as the 'Secret War'.⁹ Jones and his team were encouraged by Churchill to both anticipate and design counter-measures against German technological advances in radar, rocket technology and nuclear weapons. Occasionally fortuitous anomalies fell within the remit of scientific intelligence and piqued the curiosity of Jones, whose own interest in UFOs and psychic phenomena is chronicled in his papers at the Churchill Archives.¹⁰ Dr Jones was appointed in 1941 and promoted to Director of Intelligence at the Air Ministry in 1946 as the flap of 'ghost rocket' sightings spread across Scandinavia and Western Europe (see FT164:43). Jones's experience dealing with the first UFO flaps, in 1946-47 and 1952, led him to adopt a nuanced but sceptical attitude towards the phenomenon.

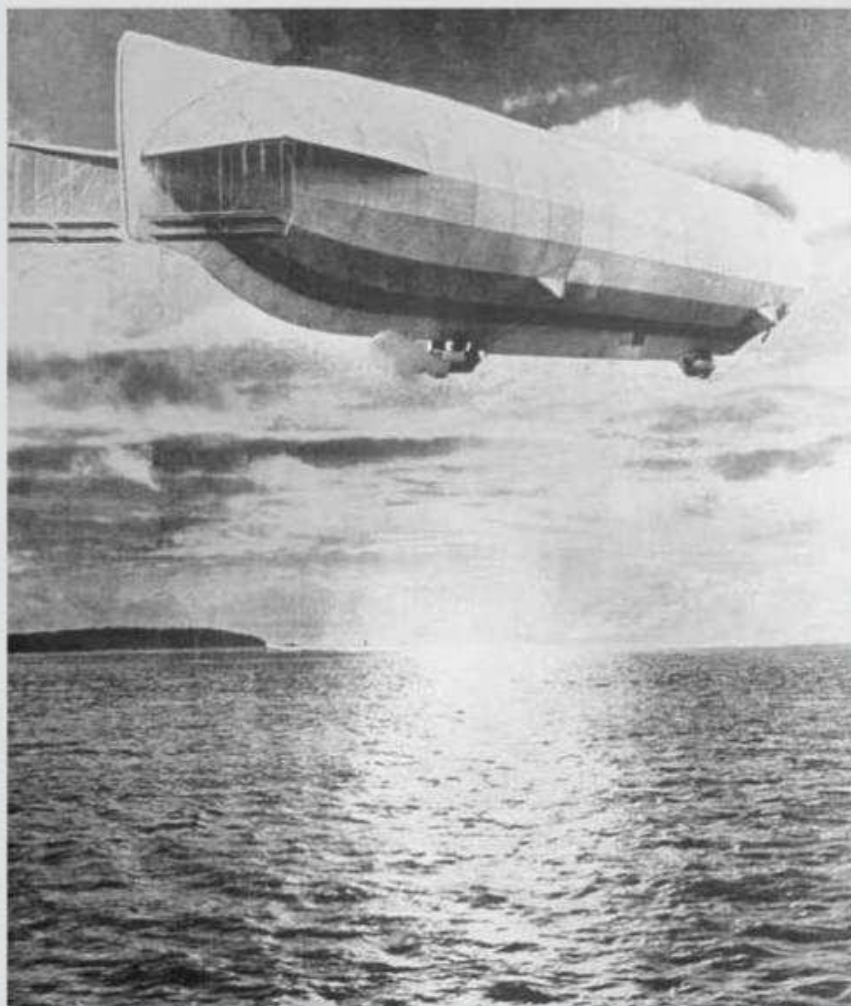
But Sir Henry Tizard (1885-1959), a member of the small group who fought what became known as Churchill's 'Wizard War', took a different view. A chemist by training and WWI test pilot, Tizard is best known for his role in the early development of radar when he and Lindemann were close friends. In 1940 he led a top secret mission to the USA to exchange Britain's most advanced technology in return for American support against the Germans. But in 1942 the two men clashed over Lindemann's plans for the strategic bombing of Germany and Tizard resigned. After his return to Whitehall in 1948 as Chief Scientific Advisor, it was Tizard who insisted that the MoD should create a 'Flying Saucer Working Party' to investigate UFO reports.¹¹ Tizard believed that reports from credible sources should not be dismissed and deserved "a full investigation". Drawing upon Tizard's contacts in America, the MoD quickly replaced 'flying saucers' with the US Air Force acronym UFO: unidentified flying

AIRSHIPS, SCARESHIPS AND FOO-FIGHTERS

Churchill's interest in strange aerial phenomena started with Britain's first phantom airships

Churchill's famous memo to the Air Ministry on flying saucers was one of the first UFO-related documents to emerge in 1986 when Cabinet papers were released at The National Archives under the '30 year rule', but his interest in unidentified aerial phenomena had a long pedigree – stretching back to before World War I. In 1912, he launched what could be described as the first government inquiry into a UFO sighting. As First Lord of the Admiralty in the Liberal government of Herbert Asquith, Churchill was drawn into high-level questions about a phantom airship flap. The panic was worked up by press accounts of strange lights and shapes in the sky that had been seen hovering above strategic dockyards and military bases along Britain's east coast. Some politicians and military officials came to believe that Germany's giant Zeppelin airships had breached the Royal Navy's control over the North Sea and were involved in a massive aerial espionage operation. Churchill did nothing to dispel that idea.

On 13 October 1912 the naval Zeppelin *L1* completed a 30-hour, 900-mile endurance flight that took it out over the North Sea from its base in northern Germany. It landed in Berlin at 3.45pm on the following afternoon. Just after sunset that same afternoon, an unidentified aircraft was seen and heard flying over the Royal Navy torpedo school and naval flying station at Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. News of the sighting reached the Admiralty, who asked the captain of the torpedo school to investigate. His report was sent to Churchill, who was quizzed in the House of Commons on 21 November about the incident. In a written response he said an inquiry had "ascertained that an unknown aircraft was heard over Sheerness" on 14 October. Flares were lighted at nearby Eastchurch airfield but the pilot did not make a landing.



TOP: Zeppelin L1, also known as LZ-14, in flight. ABOVE: A 1945 photo said to show two 'foo-fighters' accompanying a flight of Japanese fighters.

Questioned as to where our own airships were, Churchill said: "I know it was not one of our airships". The Sheerness mystery was never solved but the outcry it caused led Count Zeppelin to send a telegram to the editor of the *Daily Mail* with a blunt denial that any German airship had approached the English coast. The Zeppelin diaries, released after the war, corroborate his denial.

This incident was not the only time Churchill's name has become intertwined in wartime stories involving UFOs. In August 2010 news headlines proclaimed that Churchill had ordered a 'wartime cover-up'

of another strange incident. This story emerged when The National Archives released 5,000 pages of information from the MoD's UFO files. Among them was a rather strange letter from a scientist – name redacted – who claimed that, at the height of WWII, Churchill had ordered the concealment of a wartime UFO incident in order to avoid a mass panic of the type generated by Orson Welles's radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* (see **FT199:42-47**).

In 1999, the scientist asked the MoD for official confirmation of a story that sometime during the early 1940s, whilst

returning from a mission over Europe, a RAF reconnaissance aircraft was "intercepted by an object of unknown origin". The metallic object appeared suddenly at the side of the aircraft as it approached the English coast, hovered noiselessly for a time whilst matching its course and speed, and then accelerated away at high speed; photographs were taken by the crew. This daylight incident occurred during the same period that Allied aircrew had begun to report strange balls of fire which appeared to pursue their aircraft in night-time raids over Axis-held territory in Europe. US Air Force pilots described these pre-1947 UFOs as 'foo-fighters' but oddly, the scientist makes no reference to them in his letter to the MoD.

The source of his story was the letter-writer's grandfather, a RAF officer, who was "part of the personal bodyguard" of the Prime Minister during WWII. He was present during a discussion between Churchill and General Dwight D Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe and future US President, when the incident was discussed. After taking scientific advice, Churchill declared the incident "should be immediately classified for at least 50 years and its status reviewed by a future Prime Minister". Churchill apparently justified this extreme measure because he believed its release "would create mass panic amongst the general population and destroy one's belief in the Church".

Despite its tenuous nature, the mere mention of Churchill in the context of a UFO cover-up was a gift to the media. Out of the 10 separate media events that formed part of the National Archives UFO project, the release of the sixth tranche of records, which contained the reference to Churchill, received the most coverage. It reached an estimated print/online readership of 25 million

people. The massive exposure it received was out of all proportion to its evidential content. The writer pleaded “not to dismiss my attempts to pursue this matter as trivial or motivated by ‘crackpot’ thinking”; and, to be fair, his request for confirmation of the story was taken seriously. It was passed via MoD Security to the Cabinet Office records officer who made some checks before responding to say: “We know of no closed records from World War II on this subject”.

When examined closely the ‘Churchill ordered a UFO cover-up’ story resembles a modern legend of the type frequently found in the UFO literature. The letter writer reveals that his grandfather died in 1973, so the information was not first hand, or even second hand. He claims that, fearful of his obligations under the Official Secrets Act, the grandfather only mentioned the incident once to his daughter (the writer’s mother) *when she was nine years old*. When, in 1999, she saw a TV programme on UFOs that featured an interview with a retired RAF *foo-fighter* witness, she decided to pass the story to her son.

Although just an anecdote, it may still contain a grain of truth. Files at The National Archives reveal how, during World War II, both the British Air Ministry and the US Army Air Force collected and studied unusual sightings reported by fighter and bomber aircrew. Details of some of the more reliable sightings were passed up the chain of command and scrutinised by Dr RV Jones and others in Churchill’s scientific intelligence organisation. Given the concern within Churchill’s War Cabinet about Nazi secret weapons, his scientists were on the alert for any hint of new technology from the theatre of war. So it is possible that a garbled account of a *foo-fighter* experience might have formed the core of the account that emerged in 2010. It might also help explain Churchill’s later desire to know “the truth” about flying saucers.

National Archives references: AIR 1/2455-56 (Sheerness incident); DEFE 24/2013/1 (WW2 incident).



ABOVE: “A war of science”: (left to right) Lord Cherwell, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound and Prime Minister Winston Churchill watching a display of anti-aircraft gunnery in June 1941.

objects. But the working party’s final report, delivered to the MoD and CIA in the summer of 1951, reached an entirely negative conclusion. All reports of UFOs investigated by the MoD, its authors claimed, could be explained as known astronomical or meteorological phenomena, mistaken identifications of aircraft, balloons and birds, optical illusions, psychological delusions and deliberate hoaxes. It recommended no further work should be carried out on the subject until some new hard evidence came to light. Their brief six-page report was ‘lost’ for 50 years before my probing, using Freedom of Information legislation, unearthed a single surviving copy in the MoD archives.¹² Attached to it was a cryptic covering note from the head of Scientific Intelligence, Bertie Blount, addressed to Tizard, that read: “This is the report on ‘Flying Saucers’ for which you asked. I hope that it will serve its purpose.”

However you interpret that cryptic remark, the government remained on the defensive as Press interest in UFOs continued to grow. As the Working Party collected its data in the winter of 1950-51, newspapers adopted the fashionable topic. It was “the story that is bigger even than atom bomb wars” according to one Sunday newspaper. In October, Charles Eade, editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, published a page one splash that promoted the reality of flying saucers. The story was entirely based upon information supplied by his wartime friend Lord Mountbatten of Burma, Admiral of the Fleet, who privately expressed his belief that flying saucers were “the Shackletons and Scotts of Mars and Venus”, the same planets identified by Churchill’s essay – and Wells’s novel – as potential sources for extraterrestrial life in our own Solar System. Eade revealed his source was “one of the most famous men alive today”, whom he could not

name but who “commands universal respect and admiration”.¹³

Lord Mountbatten became the Chief of Defence Staff in 1957, by which time he had learned to keep his views on UFOs private. Other high-profile military believers, such as Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, had been the subject of ridicule for their public expressions of belief in the existence of UFOs and the spirit world (in Dowding’s case, a combination of both; see **FT225:40-47**). Along with Tizard and others – including a member of Churchill’s family – they formed a secret phalanx of ‘believers’ in the corridors of Whitehall; but they were outnumbered by scientific sceptics, including Jones and Lindemann, who, crucially, held the patronage of his friend the Prime Minister. The establishment position that Lindemann represented was that research into esoteric phenomena, as UFOs were classified, was a drain on scarce resources – an attitude that has continued to underpin all British government policy to the present day. Indeed it led directly to the conclusions of MoD’s Condign report that preceded the closure of the UFO desk in 2009 (see **FT368:26-29**).

“WHAT IS THE TRUTH?”

Ultimately, it was Lindemann’s faction who won this covert battle of wills. The scientist, elevated to Lord Cherwell in 1941, used the conclusions reached by Working Party to dismiss flying saucers as “a product of mass psychology”. His opinion dominated the Cabinet discussion that followed reports of a UFO flap over Washington DC in the summer of 1952 that alarmed both the CIA and President Harry Truman.¹⁴ The Washington DC flap filled newspaper columns, and it was a story in the *Times* that triggered Churchill’s personal interest. On 28 July he fired

SPIRITUALISM AND SUPERSTITION

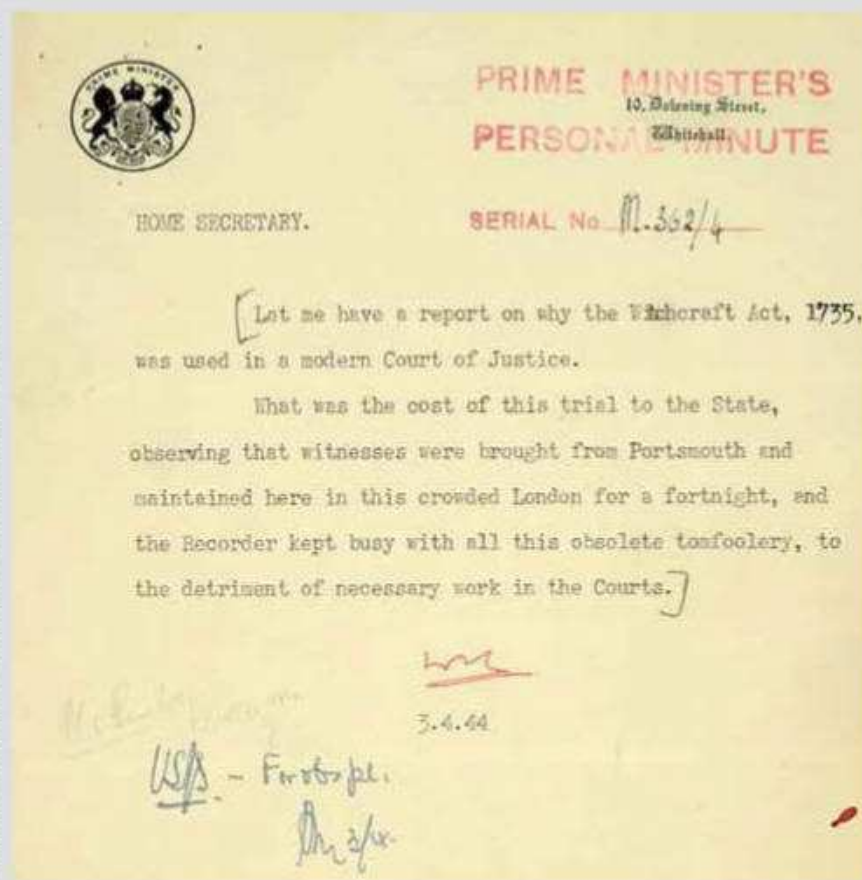
Churchill may have been open minded, but he dismissed the Helen Duncan trial as “tomfoolery”

“Churchill has always feared the supernatural not because he thought of it as bunk but because he believed in it” – Major Wellesley Tudor Pole to Rosamond Lehmann, 1964

In November 1941 the battleship *HMS Barham* was sunk by a German U-boat in the Mediterranean, with the loss of 868 lives. Relatives of the crew were not told until January of the following year to avoid giving away secrets to the Axis powers. But shortly after the loss, it was claimed the spirit of a crew member had materialised in the presence of his mother at a séance in Portsmouth, the ship’s home port. After his anxious mother called the Admiralty for confirmation, she was visited by two naval intelligence officers, possibly working for MI5, who wanted to know the source of her information.

The ‘leak’ was traced back to Scots-born spiritualist medium Helen Duncan. She was arrested in January 1944 and tried at the Old Bailey under the 1735 Witchcraft Act (see **FT16:40-43** and p45 this issue). Duncan was charged not with sorcery, but making money from fraudulent séances. The sensational trial ran for seven days, at the end of which the jury found Duncan guilty. She was jailed for nine months. Several legends have grown up around what wrongly became known as ‘the last witchcraft trial’, including one that the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was sympathetic to her plight and even secretly visited her in Holloway prison for a private sitting.

Some spiritualists believe he applied pressure that led to her early release. Chris Halton, in an online article, claims Churchill was infuriated by the sentence as he regularly consulted with mediums during WWII “for strategic war information” and also “possessed a psychic intuitiveness which guided him through tough and difficult times”. But in his book *Hellish*



Nell: Last of Britain's Witches (2001), historian Malcolm Gaskill dismisses these stories as “an inevitable fantasy”. But he adds there is compelling evidence that Churchill “allowed for the possibility of a superior existence” and was open minded about the existence of a spirit world.

Public knowledge of his interest in Helen Duncan’s plight can be traced to a note he wrote to Home Secretary Herbert Morrison on 3 April 1944. Churchill demanded to know the cost of the trial, “observing that witnesses were brought from Portsmouth and maintained here in this crowded London for a fortnight, and the Recorder kept busy with all this obsolete tomfoolery”.

Morrison responded that police had been advised to prosecute spiritualist mediums

only if there were complaints from the public about alleged fraudulent practices. “Such frauds are especially prevalent in wartime when relatives of men killed or missing are easy victims,” he wrote.

Witchcraft was not the only forteen topic to distract Churchill during the later stages of WWII. In the summer of 1944, as the tide turned against the Germans in Europe, he heard “disquieting rumours” about the imminent demise of the Barbary apes (or macaques) that lived on the Rock of Gibraltar, one of Britain’s key strategic bases in the Mediterranean. In a note to the Colonial Office dated 21 August 1944 Churchill’s private secretary Jock Colville said he was “most anxious that they should not be allowed to die out”. He adds: “I believe there

LEFT: Churchill’s note to the Home Secretary about the “tomfoolery” of the Duncan trial. BELOW LEFT: *HMS Barham* explodes. BELOW: One of Gibraltar’s macaques flies the flag.



are dire prophecies about what would happen to Gibraltar if the apes vanished”.

From the time Britain took control of the Rock in 1704 a belief spread that Gibraltar would remain under British rule for as long as the small colony of North African macaques remained there. The legend says that when the apes leave the Rock so too will the British.

Churchill had visited Gibraltar before the war and he knew how important the legend was to British morale when the rock was under threat from the Axis forces. Files at The National Archives in Kew show that he appeared to believe in the accuracy of the legend. As a direct result of his intervention, reinforcements were brought to the colony from Africa and the Governor, Sir Thomas Eastwood, sent a telegram to the Prime Minister to reassure him all was well on the rock.

We know that Churchill loved animals, but these papers also suggest that, like many ordinary folk who went to war carrying talismans ‘for good luck’, he was also superstitious.

National Archives references HO 144/22172 (Helen Duncan trial) and PREM 43/9 (Gibraltar apes).



ABOVE: Churchill the pragmatist, laying bricks at Chartwell, his home in Westerham, Kent.

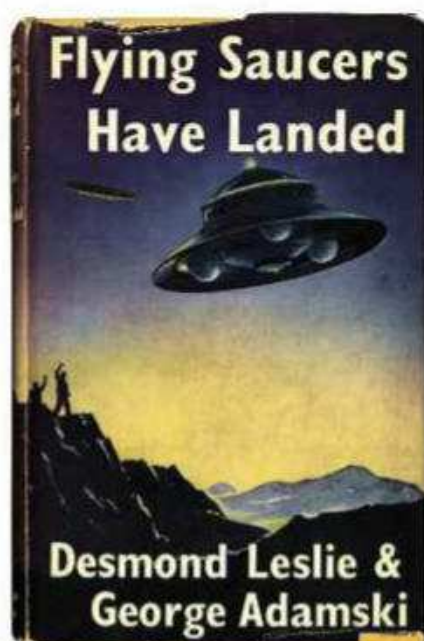
BELOW: The evidence suggests that there was another side to the statesman: his personal library contained a copy of *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, by his cousin Desmond Leslie.

off his famous memo addressed to the Air Ministry. He wanted to know: “What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth?”

The unequivocal response arrived on his desk two weeks later and was copied to Lord Cherwell. It assured the Prime Minister there was nothing to worry about and “a full intelligence study” completed in 1951 had concluded all reported sightings could be explained. “The Americans, who carried out a similar investigation in 1948/9 [Project Grudge] reached a similar conclusion. Nothing has happened since 1951 to make the Air Staff change their opinion, and, to judge from recent Press statements, the same is true in America”. Lord Cherwell had the last word on 14 August when he said he “agreed entirely with [the Air Ministry] conclusions”.¹⁵

Divining what Churchill really believed is impossible from the sparse surviving official papers. The most reliable evidence I uncovered was that provided by Anthony Montague-Browne (1923-2013) who joined the Prime Minister’s personal staff as joint private secretary in the autumn of 1952. When I raised the UFO issue with him in 2000 he clearly recalled the internal battles between believers and sceptics in Whitehall that, he said, were a “light-hearted distraction from the more serious business of the Cold War”. But he played down the depth of Churchill’s interest in UFOs as “ephemeral”, adding, “he wanted to know the facts in case he was questioned in Parliament. That’s all”.

Yet despite his deteriorating health and the heavy burdens of international diplomacy at this dangerous stage in the Cold War, it seems that Churchill’s desire to know ‘the truth’ about flying saucers was more than just a passing fad. Although only fragments of the Cabinet discussions survive, in 1987 a retired RAF official revealed that he had received a request from Air Ministry to submit a report on flying saucers “following a request from Churchill” in 1952.



Wing Commander Tim Woodman, who died in 1996, was superintendent of Test Flying at RAF Boscombe Down at the time. Puzzled but following orders, he collected information from test pilots and passed his dossier to the Air Ministry. What became of this material he had no idea.¹⁶

Meanwhile, on a visit to Chequers – the Prime Minister’s official residence in Buckinghamshire – Churchill’s son-in-law and future defence minister Duncan Sandys MP told Montague-Browne that

“he believed, or said he believed some of the evidence”. Taking a direct swipe at ‘The Prof’ (Lord Cherwell), Sandys insisted the evidence for flying saucers was no different from the first reports of German V2 guided rockets that “all our leading scientists declared to be technically impossible” but had been proved wrong. In 1943 Cherwell had assured Churchill it was “lunacy” to believe the Germans were capable of producing such weapons. Unlike the sceptics, Sandys had personally spoken to an RAF fighter pilot who filed a report of his own

sighting whilst Sandys, then Minister of Supply, was touring British air bases in West Germany (see FT289:28-29). In a minute to Cherwell, seen by Churchill, Sandys said he had no doubt the pilot “saw a phenomenon similar to that described by numerous observers in the United States”. The paper trail that shows Sandys interest in UFOs continued as he was promoted in Churchill’s last administration. In 1955, Montague-Browne sent Sandys a copy of the then-classified Air Ministry ‘Secret Intelligence Summary’ on flying saucers.¹⁷

We will never know for certain how sympathetic Churchill was to the more far-out beliefs that engaged fashionable society in the aftermath of WWII. Nor do we have any detailed surviving accounts of the private exchanges he must have had with Cherwell, Sandys and RV Jones about UFOs. The few surviving written records do not assist us much. But an anecdote from 1954, when artist Bernard Hailstone was making a portrait of a pragmatic Churchill in the grounds of his Westerham home, may provide a clue. During the proceedings the conversation between artist and Prime Minister turned to the subject of flying saucers and space travel. Did he believe in them, Hailstone asked? Churchill’s response was: “I think that we should treat other planets with the contempt they deserve”.¹⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1** The *Belfast Newsletter* of 30 Nov 1954 reveals that a second copy of Leslie and Adamski’s book was presented to Churchill on his 80th birthday by Miss E Hamilton Gruner of Kensington, along with a note wishing him many happy returns.
- 2** Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain’s Witches* (4th Estate 2001), p299.
- 3** *Guardian*, 6 Feb 2004.
- 4** James C Humas, *Churchill: The Prophetic Statesman* (Regnery History, 2012).
- 5** Winston Churchill, ‘Shall We All Commit Suicide?’, *Pall Mall magazine*, Sep 1924.
- 6** Mario Livio, ‘Winston Churchill’s essay on alien life found’, *Nature* 542, 16 Feb 2017.
- 7** ‘Are we alone in space?’ Churchill Archives (Chartwell papers) CHAR 8/644.
- 8** *Independent*, 27 Nov 2006.
- 9** RV Jones, *Most Secret War* (Hamish Hamilton, 1978).
- 10** RV Jones papers, Churchill Archives, University of Cambridge NCUACS 95.8.0.
- 11** TNA DEFE 41/74.
- 12** TNA DEFE 44/119.
- 13** *Sunday Dispatch*, 1 Oct 1950.
- 14** Duncan Sandys papers, Churchill Archive, DSND 15/4.
- 15** TNA PREM 11/855.
- 16** Letters from Tim Woodman to Andy Roberts, Aug-Sep 1987.
- 17** TNA PREM 11/855 and AIR 22/93.
- [18] *Daily Telegraph*, 26 Jan 1965.

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SPELLBOUND

MAGIC, RITUAL AND WITCHCRAFT

MALCOLM GASKILL, one of the curators of a new exhibition at Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, reflects on how the artefacts and images on display – from love locks to witch bottles – connect the inner lives of human beings to a magical Universe animated by our most powerful hopes and fears.

In 1915 the folklorist Margaret Murray met an old woman near Hove, East Sussex, who gave her a small glass bottle. It was silvered, ribbed and bulbous, sealed with a cork and brown wax, and it came with a warning. "They do say," confided the woman, "that there be a witch in it, and if you let un out there'll be a peck o' trouble." We don't know how the witch was meant to have ended up in there, nor whether Murray even believed the story, only that she never uncorked the bottle. Well, would you?

To see this extraordinary object, and consider its occult possibilities, you should head this autumn for the dreaming spires of Oxford, where the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology is hosting *Spellbound*, an exhibition devoted to magic, ritual and witchcraft. Nearly 200 objects and images spanning 800 years have been gathered together to evoke the weirdness and wonder of the past and provoke uneasy feelings in the present. For *Spellbound* is more than a three-dimensional history lecture. It explores 'magical thinking', the innate human habit of allowing hopes and fears to affect what we over-confidently consider to be logical thought. The lavishly illustrated exhibition catalogue calls it "a powerful applied fantasy".

The exhibition emerged from a research project, 'Inner Lives: Emotions, Identity and the Supernatural, 1300-1900', funded by the Leverhulme Trust, led by me between 2015 and 2018. In that time I learned a little about museum curatorship, from dealing with disappointment when requests to borrow were declined to writing haiku-like labels. One of my research collaborators, Sophie Page, a historian



LEFT: The glass bottle given to Margaret Murray by an old woman in Hove, East Sussex: "They do say that there be a witch in it". FACING PAGE: Anonymous English artist, *A Boy with Coral*, c.1670. Coral was believed to repel witches and was used to make children's rattles.

archaeologist Ceri Houlbrook, an expert in ritual deposits, complete the team. We've been interested in how beliefs and emotions flow together through objects and rituals, and how people understand themselves in relation to households, communities and a cosmos charged with mysterious forces.

HOPES AND FEARS

The mediæval universe was majestically infinite and infinitely strange, yet was experienced by individuals who engaged with it in a very personal way. *Spellbound* displays manuscripts that connect the conscious human body to the stars and the resonating layers of an onion-like celestial sphere. The late 15th-century 'planet

man' diagram from an illuminated 'book of hours' is a superb example. The significance of such items is emotional as well as scientific. Many exhibits reflect intense fear and peril, even rage and spite, but also a great deal of love – love as yearning, as amity, and as a medium to bind people to each other, to converse with angels and demons, and to access sacred power for security on Earth and salvation after death. In the modern Western world, astrology and medicine are separate concepts and practical concerns: in the Middle Ages they were intricately and dynamically connected. Positive and negative emotions were

200 objects and images evoke the weirdness and wonder of the past

of mediæval magic, together with the art historian Marina Wallace, has taken the curatorial lead. Owen Davies, an authority on supernatural history, and the

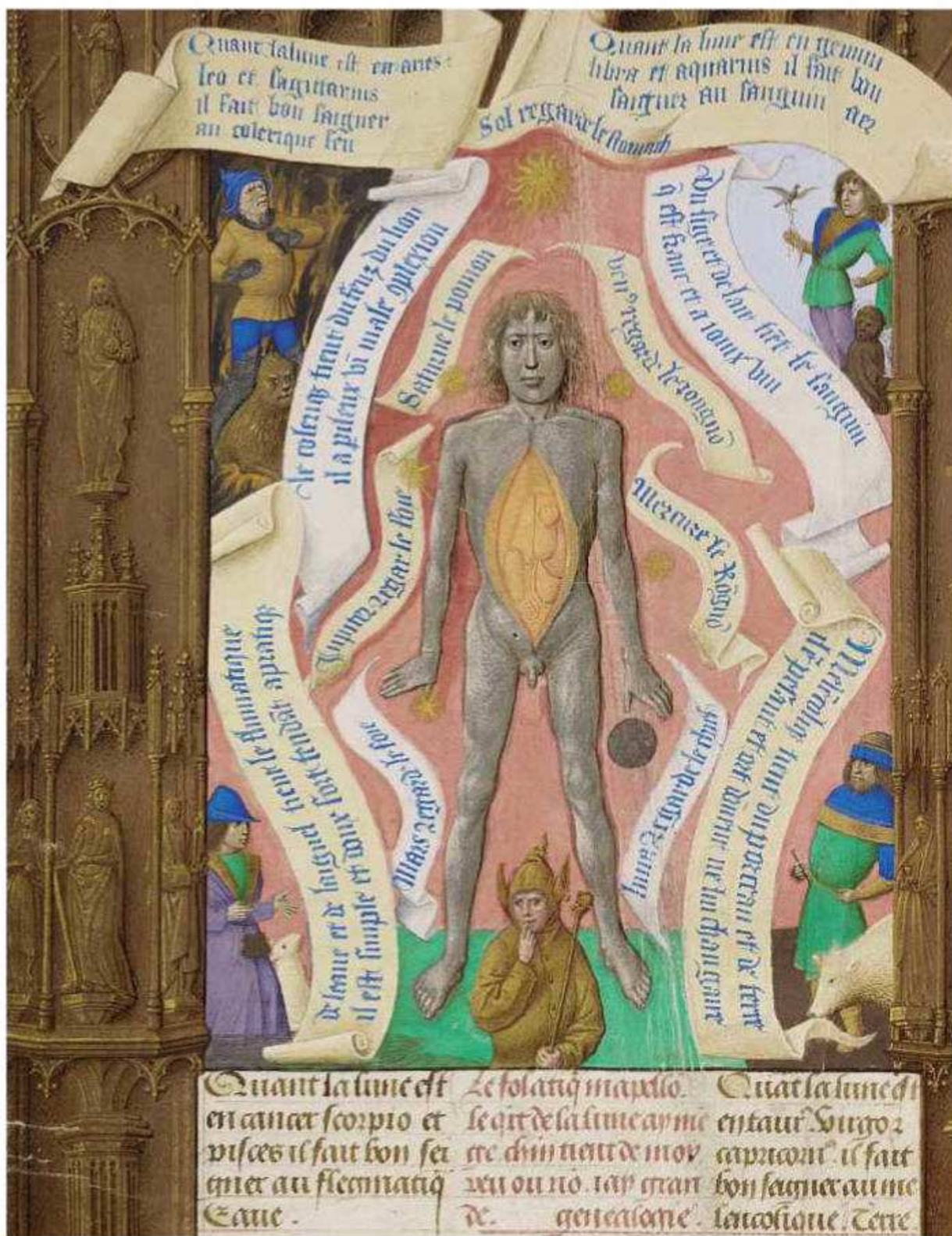


both born of desire, which *Spellbound* emphasises as an essentially human characteristic. People every bit as anxious and optimistic as ourselves wondered how they might alter the course of fate, exercising free will through magic in ways that went beyond the passive supplication of prayer, even pushing against divine and secular law.

We were fortunate to borrow a number of charms and amulets, from cast lead pilgrims' badges depicting St Michael the Archangel (to protect the soul) to lavish carved rock crystal balls (for divination). From the British Museum comes a smooth obsidian 'scrying mirror', once the property of the enigmatic Elizabethan magus Dr John Dee (see FT248:76, 290:74, 338:12). There is a scarlet coral children's rattle – coral was believed to repel witches – and an ear-pick engraved with the name of Christ. There are rings and brooches and locket, a carved mandrake root, a mole in a bag, and a desiccated human heart entombed in a heart-shaped box. New College, Oxford, lent a pair of narwhal tusks, once thought to be unicorn's horns. The unicorn symbolised Christ's invincibility, but like so many other religious objects these tusks had more worldly uses. The reason one is shorter is supposedly that Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, stole its tip to grind it up as an aphrodisiac, much as, sadly, African rhino horn is used in alternative medicines today.

What all these intriguing objects have in common is that sentient, intelligent people once invested them with occult power in order, they hoped, to fulfil their wishes and allay their fears – wishes and fears we all share. Magical thinking is a matter of practice as well as belief, using devotional objects and magical instruments to draw power down from the Universe. This was not restricted to magi and wizards but part of everyday life for ordinary people, who felt the force of magic more than they could ever understand it.

Mediæval love tokens to secure affection have modern descendants in the engraved padlocks which one sees attached to fences and bridges (see FT239:25, 294:16). Devoted lovers inscribe locks with messages and, where possible, throw the key into the river. *Spellbound* displays 900 'love locks' cut from the Leeds Centenary Bridge. One reads: "Sam & Kirsty. Locked in Love. 27/07/12". Sam and Kirsty were in effect ritually channelling their passion through an inanimate object to cast a kind of spell. The same might be said of the tiny brown medicine bottle containing a phial of oil of cloves, a scrap of metal, two coins, and a set of human teeth, found on the Thames foreshore in the 1980s. Here the emotion may have been hope for a cure (possibly from toothache), or something more sinister. People have long attempted



BODLEIAN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Deep down we all have a feeling for what is called sympathetic magic



ABOVE: The 'planet man' from an illuminated 15th century 'book of hours' connects the human body with the celestial sphere.

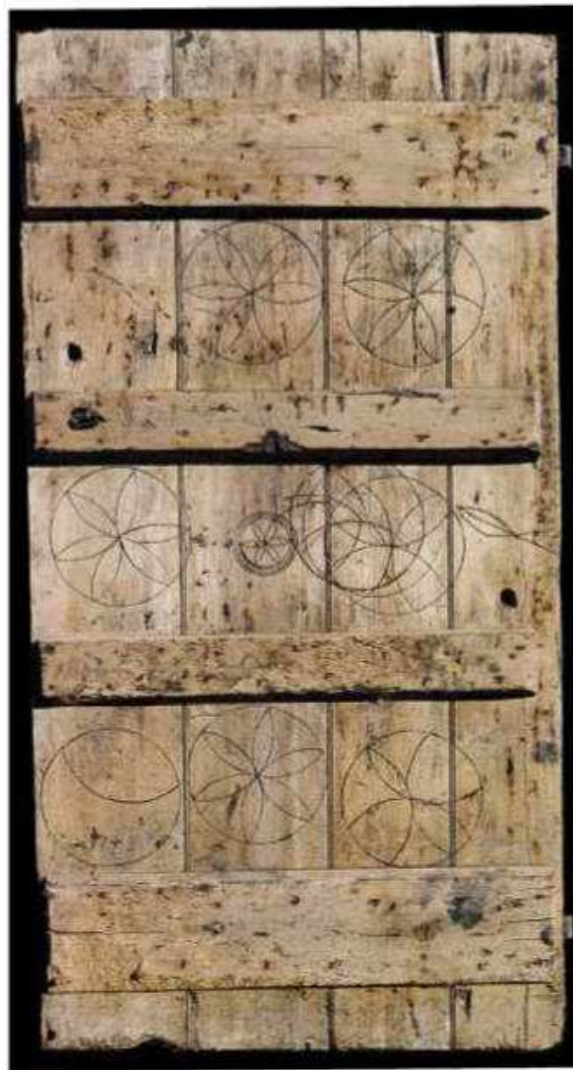
LEFT: An obsidian scrying mirror that once belonged to Elizabethan magus Dr John Dee.

to cause harm as well as imputing that power to witches. The Edwardian 'curse poppet' skewered through the face with a stiletto dagger is a disturbing reminder of the endurance of this ancient belief in the modern era. Voodoo is familiar to us from horror films (and especially the Bond movie *Live and Let Die*), but whether or not we believe in the power of sticking pins in an effigy, deep down we all have a feeling for what is called 'sympathetic magic': the idea that an effect in one place might be indirectly caused through a visually similar proxy like a voodoo doll.

The main gallery is devoted to the relatively recent past. Visitors encounter a looming, black, house-like structure where protective charms are secreted in illuminated recesses, hinting at their concealment and later their exposure,

usually during building work. These include a mummified cat and rat, a bull's heart stuck with thorns, and a wide range of pots, spoons, tools, shells, fossils and bones – domestic rubbish made magical through ritual, belief and emotion. The blades of a pair of unused homemade steel knives found in the thatched roof of a 19th-century cottage at Dunham, Norfolk, were crossed to repel evil. There are also old shoes and clothes such as a corset from around 1630, discovered under floorboards in Sittingbourne in Kent. Sometimes quantities of discarded apparel and other goods are found in voids, ritual deposits known as 'spiritual middens'. More than just household dumps, these were invisible shrines suffused with imagined protective power – a power derived from some personal essence felt to be lingering in well-worn possessions. Also on display is an oak door from a cowshed in Laxfield, Suffolk, inscribed with daisy wheel or 'hexafoil' patterns, thought to be magically defensive or 'apotropaic' symbols.

Spellbound also has several 17th-century 'witch bottles', stoneware jugs filled with urine, nail parings, hair and bent pins (see FT142:26, 255:16, 359:32-37), and discovered beneath hearths and thresholds – weak spots in the home where evil spirits might intrude. Once again, entirely unsupported by reason, humans are prone to the feeling that they can transfer something of themselves into objects. Witch bottles were boiled in the belief that some ill-defined trace of the witch was left behind in her victims' bodies, which, once excreted or removed, like hair, could then



be used to break the maleficent spell. An example from the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, Cornwall (see FT348:34-39), is recorded as having been found in a bomb-damaged building in Plymouth: it contains not only hair and nail clippings but bird bones and a tiny coral hand. Another bottle from the same collection turns out to be a Victorian or

early 20th-century fake, but all the more interesting for having turned up around 1950 in a tomb near Exeter Cathedral, full of black sludge.

RAGE AND RECRIMINATION

Whereas the first two galleries mainly concern love and anxiety, the third focuses squarely on fear and rage aimed at witches, mostly prosecuted in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Florentine artist Salvator Rosa's extraordinary painting *Witches at their Incantations*, from around 1646 and on loan from the National Gallery in London, is a nightmarish tableau of evil, where Satan's followers gather under cover of darkness to work their malevolent magic. The engravings that line the walls depict provocatively naked hags letting their hair down both literally and metaphorically, making them potent symbols of social, political and religious rebellion. Melchior Küsel's *Allegory of Discord* from around 1670 is a striking representation of a hideous post-menopausal woman unleashing her furious spite on the world, fomenting conflict everywhere from the heavens to the neighbourhood, where even dogs are fighting.

As well as ideological object lessons in disobedience and disorder, witches were also a mundane enemy within, a real and terrifying threat to households and communities. It was not always obvious where to point the finger, however, and proving guilt was difficult in the face of surprisingly high levels of scepticism, not just in the age of the Enlightenment, but

PRIVATE COLLECTION



TOP: Oak calf-shed door marked with magical symbols to protect livestock, from Laxfield, Suffolk, 19th century. **ABOVE LEFT:** 'Poppet' of stuffed fabric in Edwardian-style black dress with stiletto through face, 1909-13. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Contemporary 'love lock' on Leeds Centenary Bridge, 2016.

THE MUSEUM OF WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC, BOSCASTLE

COURTESY OF CERI HOULBROOK



ABOVE: Salvator Rosa's *Witches at their Incantations*, c.1646 – “a nightmarish tableau of evil”.

BELOW: Melchior Küsel's *Allegory of Discord*, 1670 – “a hideous post-menopausal woman unleashing her furious spite on the world, fomenting conflict everywhere”.

from the Middle Ages onwards. Opinion was often divided, which explains why there were 100,000 witch-trials and not the many millions one sometimes reads about, and also why half of these prosecutions ended in acquittal.

A ‘witch scale’, an iron chair balanced against a couple of Bibles – the one displayed is an old replica from the Boscastle Museum – would have been used to weigh suspects to see if they were damningly lighter than scripture. It probably served more to exonerate accused witches than condemn them, but still evokes the reality of persecuting beliefs and is a troubling object in itself. Better-known tests included the water ordeal. In 1613 Mary Sutton from Bedfordshire was thrown into a milldam to see whether she floated or sank. She floated, which galvanised a fearful, vengeful community into testifying against her, resulting in her execution. *Spellbound* displays an original pamphlet account of the episode, complete with a woodcut illustration of the hapless witch being swum.

The best evidence of witchcraft was the confession, in some countries extracted using torture but also given voluntarily. Margaret Moore fell prey to the vicious East Anglian witch-finding campaign of the 1640s and, it seems, unburdened herself of guilt before a magistrate. *Spellbound* displays the original document containing her words, accompanied by a moving sound dramatisation by the theatre director Andy Jordan and recorded by Andy Cox. In this tragic





ABOVE LEFT: Helen Duncan emerging from curtains with 'ectoplasm', her hands holding those of others at the séance, Edinburgh, 1933.

ABOVE RIGHT: Helen Duncan's 'ectoplasm' c. 1939, imitation silk.



story, Moore claims she was visited by demons shaped like her dead children, who promised to save her last child's life in exchange for her soul. A second document and recording tell the story of Katherine Parsons, a Norfolk woman who accused a neighbour, Ellen Garrison, of using witchcraft to kill her children after a quarrel over a pig. In this case, Matthew Hopkins, the 'Witchfinder General' (see **FT198:30-36, 367:32-39**), guided the community's investigation, which involved watching Garrison to see if the Devil's imps came to her. Apparently, they did: one was a speeding beetle. The Moore and Garrison cases are both saturated with emotion: anxiety, yearning, grief, paranoia, rage, recrimination, elevated off the page by the dramatisations, reviving our ancestors' passions and magical thinking as a terrifying supernatural reality.

AETHER AND ECTOPLASM

Spellbound is an immersive experience, where laconic and sometimes repellent pictures, texts and objects are coaxed back to life, their latent emotional and magical power unleashed. Apart from the lavish, seductive design (the work of renowned architects Stanton Williams), and the eerily evocative dramatisations, three contemporary artworks have been specially commissioned for the exhibition. These resulted from collaboration with the historians involved. Ackroyd & Harvey have conceived *From Aether to Air*, which includes a pair of menacing demons cast from aluminium potassium

sulphate crystals. Katharine Dowson's *Concealed Shield* invites the visitor into a dark chimney-like chamber where a glass heart shot through with red laser diodes hangs overhead. For the 'witchcraft' gallery, Annie Cattrell has created *Verocity*, a tense, sensuous film of fire, which evolves like the suspicion and accusation of witches from a tentative flickering flame into a conflagration. They are extraordinary pieces, beautiful and engaging, but appropriately unsettling.

Verocity's billowing fiery clouds are one of the exhibition's many visual correspondences, a dynamic animation not only of the smoky cauldrons seen in several displayed engravings but also of the ectoplasmic effusions of the Spiritualist medium Helen Duncan, the last person imprisoned, in 1944, under the 1735 Witchcraft Act (see **FT FT116:40-43** and p38 this issue). Between the 1930s and 1950s, Duncan conducted hundreds of dimly lit séances at which spirits of the dead were allegedly summoned from beyond the veil and clothed in ectoplasm. At a gathering in Wales in 1939 a sceptical sitter grabbed a length of this 'ectoplasm', actually imitation silk, which he sent to the ghost-hunter Harry Price (see **FT229:28-36**). It survives in the archives of the Society for Psychical Research, housed today in the Cambridge University Library, and is displayed at *Spellbound*, elegantly draped, silently mysterious. Its power consists not only in that, however, but in the intense emotions of grief and hope that supported belief in Spiritualism in the era of the bloodiest wars in human

history.

The curators of *Spellbound* intend that visitors don't just come to gawp at ectoplasm and all the other curiosities, separated from this lost world by an inch of glass, a few decades or centuries, and the reassuring shift in outlook and lifestyle we call modernity. The magical thinking at the heart of the exhibition makes this not merely them-and-us history, but a penetrating investigation of present-centred, indeed universal human nature. As they arrive, visitors are asked a number of searching questions: do you have a lucky object, do rituals stop you feeling anxious, could you stab an image of a loved one, is there a witch in this bottle, and so on. They will then, with any luck, carry these thoughts around the exhibition, narrowing the gap between past and present, and challenging cherished assumptions we have about ourselves – our mentalities and identities – as elegantly constructed illusions.

If you find you are both absolutely certain that there is no witch in that silvery bottle and just as sure you wouldn't want to open it, then *Spellbound* might just have found the magic in you.

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Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft is at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, until 6 Jan 2019. www.ashmolean.org/spellbound.

Speaking in Tongues:

The Perils of Polyglot EVP Research

According to the proponents of electronic voice phenomena, the dead want to communicate with us: so much so that they speak in languages we are familiar with. **BENJAMIN RADFORD** listens with a sceptical ear, and finds only circular logic and faulty methodology at work.

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
– Bernard Shaw

Electronic voice phenomena (EVP), the supposed attempts of the dead to contact the living through recorded audio media, has enjoyed a new burst of popularity over the past decade among ghost hunting groups.

The interpretation of specific noises, raps, and taps as communication by spirits is very old, but the notion of recording the voices of the disembodied dead is much more recent. In their simplest form, EVP are heard as voices and bits of speech hidden amongst the background noise and static from audio recordings, radios, televisions, and other devices. Ghost hunters claim that such interference is created (or modified) by spirits trying to speak to us from the afterlife. The fundamental problem is that it's not clear what the “anomalous” sounds are – whether they are ordinary random sounds from the environment, errant radio signals, or even from the ghost investigators themselves.

Some, if not most or all, EVP are created by a well-understood psychological process called apophenia, which causes people to “hear” distinct sounds in random white noise patterns such as the background static in an audio recording (similar to mistakenly hearing the doorbell or the mobile while one is in the shower). EVPs are created in our brains and influenced by our expectations. If a ghost hunter is expecting (or hoping) to hear words or phrases in faint sounds – especially in the context of a haunting – he or she just might do so.

Laboratory tests have demonstrated that EVPs can be artificially created. C Maxwell Cede, an honorary secretary of the SPR, was a sceptic, citing experiments in which



LEFT: Friedrich Jurgenson, the Swedish singer whose accidental recording of a mysterious voice in 1959 launched the modern EVP movement.

in 1959, when a Swedish opera singer turned painter named Friedrich Jurgenson set up a microphone on the windowsill of his country home outside Stockholm, intent on recording bird songs. As Jurgenson tells it, a titmouse was suddenly and mysteriously drowned out by a male voice saying something about ‘bird songs at night’.” Puzzled by this apparent appearance of an unknown voice, a voice not necessarily assumed to be from the dead, Jurgenson recorded more and more, coming to believe that he was hearing short messages and

voices directed at him from extraterrestrials. Roach notes that “Jurgenson wrote a book, and the book caught the eye of a Latvian-speaking psychologist named Konstantin Raudive. Raudive picked up the EVP ball and ran with it,” eventually recording 70,000 snippets of “extra voices” and sounds he became convinced were voices of the dead. Jurgenson’s work was sloppy and unscientific (“considered today to contain rather flimsy research” notes Peter H Aykroyd in his 2009 book *A History*

of Ghosts), and much of Raudive’s EVP research was eventually discredited as well.

BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE?

Nonetheless, there have been sporadic efforts at bringing some scientific rigour to EVP research. One of the most recent was made by Anabela Cardoso, a Portuguese diplomat who often goes by the name “Dr

People ‘hear’ distinct sounds in random white noise patterns

people were able to hear and transcribe words and even meaningful phrases from what was in fact merely white noise. Other scientific experiments have reached similar conclusions (for more on this, see Joe Banks’s book *Rorschach Audio*, Disinformation, 2012).

According to Mary Roach in her book *Spook: Science Tackles the Afterlife* (WW Norton & Co, 2005): “The EVP movement got its start



Cardoso” but who does not, it seems, have an earned doctorate degree. In 2012, Cardoso published an article titled “A Two-Year Investigation of the Allegedly Anomalous Electronic Voices or EVP” in a scientific-sounding journal called *NeuroQuantology* (as of 2016 the publication had impact factor of 0.586, ranking 249 out of 259 neuroscience journals).

Cardoso is a former member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and author of *Electronic Contact with the Dead: What Do the Voices Tell Us?* (2017), and the 2010 book *Electronic Voices: Contact with Another Dimension?* The latter is described in its promotional material as “the story of a normal woman who experienced the impossible: objective contacts with another dimension through loud and clear voices received by electronic means during Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC) experiments. Dr Cardoso... describes the astounding experiences that transformed her life since she started ITC research in 1997. She presents extracts of conversations with her deceased loved ones and other personalities who insisted that they live in another world.”

Cardoso’s *NeuroQuantology* article “describes in detail the tests designed to record the allegedly anomalous electronic voices, or EVP, under controlled acoustic conditions. A series of experiments was carried out in Vigo, Spain, throughout a period of two years under conditions controlled to the highest degree achievable. Several operators were involved in the many tests conducted in Acoustic Laboratories and professional recording studios equipped with very high levels of acoustic shielding... Several extra voices were recorded during the many experiments performed for which no normal explanation was found”.

In carefully reviewing Cardoso’s article I found a litany of errors and methodological flaws. Space does not permit a point-by-point discussion, but they include potential bias in the investigators (“all were experienced EVP operators with positive results” instead of independent, objective researchers, agnostic about the validity of EVP); the possibility that stray radio emissions accounted for at least some of the EVP voices (discussed presently); and clear overreaching in attempts to create linguistic meaning in ambiguous content.

To choose just one example, Cardoso describes what she claims sounds like an EVP of a dog barking. She notes that: “This is perhaps the most interesting acoustic occurrence of the afternoon because, six seconds later, the operator [researcher] addresses his deceased dog Golfa and begs her for a sign, a bark, some evidence that she is near.” Thus, Cardoso concludes, the canine ghost demonstrated psychic or precognitive powers and “was able to read the operator’s thought” and bark in anticipation of an upcoming request.

Of course many sounds might *resemble* a dog’s bark, ranging from a cough to the word “are” in rapid speech. Though Cardoso “verified” to her satisfaction that the sound really was a bark (and “more than a dozen people” agreed with that interpretation), what exactly she asked and how the question was phrased are important. Did she play the sound and ask the leading question, “Does this sound like a dog’s bark?” or did she play the sound and ask, “What, if anything, does this sound like?” It would have been interesting to know what species of dog Golfa was, and whether the sound of the “bark” plausibly matched that species; a Dachshund will sound different to a Great Dane, for example, but Cardoso seems not to have

inquired about this.

Cardoso’s conclusions suggest, curiously, that the interdimensional dead she claims to contact are omniscient (or at the very least have precognitive powers, reading people’s minds and knowing what they will later do or say) and yet apparently don’t know what language they speak – replying to them on occasion in a language they don’t understand. Cardoso glosses over this contradiction and makes no attempt to explain it.

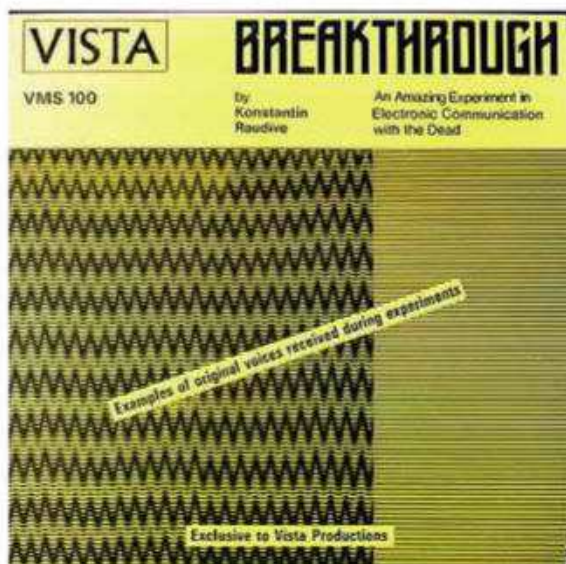
POLYGLOT PREDILECTIONS

Cardoso’s background as a career diplomat (and her consequent familiarity with different languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, and English) exponentially increases the likelihood of her gathering (or, if you prefer, “recognising”) supposedly meaningful phonemes in otherwise random background noise or stray sounds. A brief string of sounds that may be meaningless in one language may be perfectly clear in another.

Without some way of knowing or proving what languages ghosts (or interdimensional beings) speak, there’s no way to be sure what, if anything, is being said. For all we know, everyday ordinary background noises and ambient sounds (footsteps, keyboard taps, vehicle rumblings) may in fact be the unrecognised sounds of an unknown language spoken to us by alien or spiritual entities that simply choose to speak at the exact moment that we would *expect* to hear a sound from whatever source. Such a theory is preposterous, of course, but it cannot be proven wrong and has no less evidence for it than many other common assumptions about ghostly communications.

For example, an English speaker who believes he or she hears the word “da” in an EVP might dismiss it as an irrelevant random sound (or, of course, might instead decide it’s baby talk for “dad” or “father”); but a person who speaks English and German would likely take the same “da” as a meaningful (it means “there” in German and “yes” in Russian). In Belizean Kriol, “da” can mean “at” or “to”; an Italian or Spanish speaker might interpret it as “to give”, while in Norwegian it means “then”. A Danish speaker would also hear “da” as “then”, but perhaps also “when” or “as”. In Japanese, “da” is an informal way of saying “is”, and so on.

The point is that what a sound or phoneme means depends entirely on the language of the speaker and the context: because “da” (or any other phoneme) can have so many meanings, it is consequently meaningless to ghost hunters and EVP researchers. Since there is no way to reliably confirm the dead speaker’s intent or language (a ghost confirming its preferred language



ABOVE: EVP pioneer Konstantin Raudive, who claimed to have recorded some 70,000 ‘voices of the dead’.



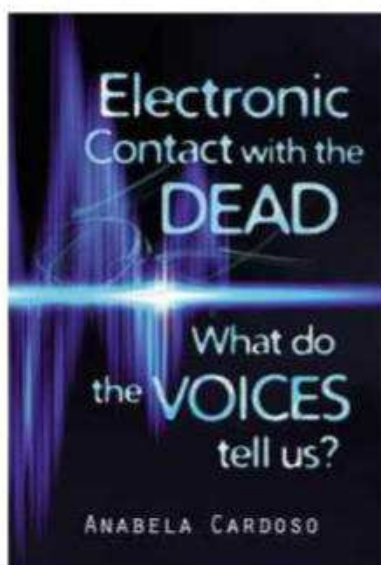
ABOVE: Anabela Cardoso, speaking about Instrumental Transcommunication, or ITC, at a parapsychology conference in 2015. **BELOW:** Cardoso has written numerous articles and two books on EVP.

via EVP is of course a textbook example of circular logic and question-begging), any interpretation is necessarily derived entirely by the listeners, and is both limited and guided by their native tongue, biases, expectations, and so on.

Cardoso gives examples of alleged EVPs that are in a different language to the prompts they are supposedly responding to, for example a question in English later followed by an EVP in Portuguese. While this discrepancy passes without comment by Cardoso, it's difficult to know what to make of it, or why a discarnate entity supposedly making a sincere effort to communicate with a person would choose to respond in a language unknown to that person.

Cardoso repeatedly finds meaning (what she calls "semantic reference") in responses that have little or no connection with the prompt they are supposedly responding to. For example, soon after beginning a session she hears what she interprets as "there is record" (English translation of the supposedly Portuguese sounds). Cardoso admits there is no clear referent here but reframes this non-sequitur miss as a hit by speculating that the comment referred not to any speech or thought by anyone present but instead merely to the fact that the session – like all of the sessions – was being recorded. Armed with this floor-scraping bar

The human brain is adept at finding connections between ideas and data points



of evidence, Cardoso and her team can and do find meaning in nearly any seemingly meaningful sound or phrase. She can hear the word "said" with no apparent referent, but quickly supply one: if someone present was thirsty at the time, or drank coffee or cola during the break just before recording – well, you see, "sed" means "thirst" in Spanish and Portuguese, so that's obviously what the unseen entity was referring to. The human brain is

astonishingly adept at finding connections between ideas and data points, whether they exist or not.

This phenomenon is common in the psychology of the paranormal; I've seen it many times, for example in the context of psychic mediums relaying messages from

the dead and having audience members make objectively tenuous, but seemingly personal and meaningful, connections to their lives. In these cases, it's the audience (or the sitter) who supplies meaning and context to the situation.

SHIELDED FROM CRITICISM

Linguistic interpretation issues aside, there are also questions about where the sounds were coming from. After all, Cardoso takes pains to remind the readers that they were in soundproof spaces when the EVP were recorded.

Cardoso's work was profiled in a 25 March 2013 BBC News report by Jolyon Jenkins, which highlighted flaws in her methodologies. Cardoso, predictably, was unhappy with the piece and complained at length to the BBC. In correspondence to Cardoso dated 4 November 2013, Richard Hutt, Complaints Director for the BBC, stated that: "I recognise your argument on the possible consequences of stray radio emissions on reserved frequencies, and I have read the document that you supplied, which is credited to an anonymous academic... It does not seem to me that this discounts the possibility of stray emissions or other audio phenomena at those frequencies (or adjacent channel interference). In the first place, from my reading of the document, this would include the prospect of sounds arising from mobile maritime services, aeronautical mobile services or by fixed service stations operating within national frontiers. In the second place, the fact that the law might preclude other transmissions on certain frequencies would not guarantee that this did not happen, or that it *could* not – only that it *should* not."

The issue of proper shielding is key to Cardoso's claims – it's a topic she takes great pains to detail – and Hutt's reply raises several valid issues (not the least of which is why an "anonymous academic" is being quoted by Cardoso). Cardoso's argument is basically that there cannot be stray broadcast emissions in the region that she is mistaking for interdimensional voices because such broadcasts might violate the law. This is like saying that an unseen car heard zooming by on the street outside must have been the result of an auditory illusion because going faster than the speed limit on that street is illegal – and of course no one would break the law.

The significance of the specific languages of the EVP seems to have been lost on Cardoso and her researchers. The bulk of the "interdimensional" communications were, it is claimed, identified as mainly either Spanish or Portuguese, followed by English. The reason why – other than that those are languages familiar to Cardoso – seems clearer when you identify where the experiments were conducted: not in, say, Norway or China (where Spanish and Portuguese are relatively uncommon) but instead in Spain. And not just anywhere in



JOSÉ LUIS FILIPO CABANA / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Vigo, Spain, where Cardoso made her EVP recordings. The city is only 10 miles from the border with Portugal, so it's no surprise that most of the 'communications' picked up by Cardoso were fragments of Spanish and Portuguese – the languages of most radio broadcasts in the region. **BELOW:** *FT* tackles EVP in 2005.

Spain, but the city of Vigo, which is about 10 miles from the border with Portugal.

The vast majority of radio broadcasts in that specific location will obviously be in Spanish and Portuguese, with some English broadcasts likely as well. Cardoso, of course, insists that extensive measures were taken to prevent radio waves from reaching their recording equipment. But, just for the sake of argument, let's say that over the course of two years, a rare, stray signal – however faint or random – might have been picked up. Cardoso would argue that the fact that the languages she detected as EVP *just happened to be the dominant languages broadcast in that area* is a complete coincidence. Cardoso's own results actually bolster Richard Hutt's suspicion that radio broadcasts may account for her "interdimensional" voices of the dead.

Far from obtaining her EVP "under conditions controlled to the highest degree achievable", Cardoso could have improved the strength of her research in several ways, including choosing a linguistically neutral location and recording all frequencies simultaneously during the experiments (for later comparison to rule out radio wave contamination).

I do not question Cardoso's sanity, sincerity, or conviction; she, like dozens of other EVP experiencers I've met, clearly

believes that she has been contacted by some unknown disincarnate entity. Unfortunately, she also, like many others, has assumed the mantle of martyr, claiming that sceptics and reporters blindly reject her findings out of fear of the unknown or of acknowledging a new scientific paradigm. She finds it hard to accept that that pareidolia is as likely to have an effect on her as on anyone else; but as Richard Feynman has noted, the first rule of science is not to fool yourself – and you are the easiest person to fool. Cardoso clearly believes that the time, difficulty, and expense she has taken to shield her recorders from outside interference has resulted in strong EVP evidence.

In the end, despite the obvious dedication and preparation that Cardoso and her colleagues put into the experiments described in the *NeuroQuantology* article, they have not convincingly ruled out the possibility of outside interference;

nor have they demonstrated that the EVP are intelligent responses. While Cardoso readily admits that "a good number of [EVP] reports might be attributable to pareidolia" and clearly understands many of the fundamental pitfalls inherent in EVP (for instance, "when trying to identify a meaning, subconscious thinking may lead to that word"; "the use of human phonemes in whatever form increases the

probability of pareidolia"; "with the EVP-maker software, it is easy to find 'results' in recording sessions where they do not exist", and so on), she does not make a convincing case for what should distinguish a real EVP from auditory pareidolia. Her argument is basically that the "messages" she likes (or is impressed with, or finds meaning in) are real, and the others are not. Unlike many EVP researchers, including Jurgenson and Raudive, Cardoso has the benefit of hindsight and a good grasp of EVP recording and interpretation problems – she just doesn't seem to think they apply to her.

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See also Jurgen Heinzerling, 'All About EVP,' **FT104:26-30**; Judith Chisholm, 'Distant Voices', **FT194:26-30**; Christopher Josiffe, "A Little History of Spirit Technology, **FT363:30-37**.



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THE MISAPPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

Continuing his examination of the rise of Hindu nationalism across India, **SD TUCKER** finds that science too is now being made to turn orange – and telephones to become increasingly brown.

Last month, we saw how, flushed with electoral success, politicians from India's governing BJP Party were busy rewriting history across their nation from a profoundly prejudiced (and profoundly inaccurate) Hindu nationalist perspective, dubbed either *Hindutva*, or 'Saffronism', after the orange-coloured robes of Hindu holy men. Well, they do say history is written by the victors. But what about science? That is meant to be rather more objective in its nature, isn't it? You can't just have a Hindu law of radioactivity being taught in opposition to a rival Western one, can you? Actually, just so long as you don't care about the trifling matter of factual scientific accuracy, it appears that you can.

Take Satyapal Singh, currently the BJP's Minister for Higher Education, whom we met last issue arguing that the aeroplane was not a Western invention, but an Indian one (see FT369:8). Something which definitely was a Western invention in Mr Singh's eyes, however, was Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which he has decried as being both "scientifically wrong" and merely "part of the mentality of the British" which had been foolishly retained by Indians following the end of the Raj. Somewhat aping the Victorian anti-Darwinist preacher 'Soapy' Sam Wilberforce, Singh has haughtily declared "my ancestors were not apes", on the grounds that, so far as he knew, nobody in India, not even "our grandparents", had ever "seen an ape turning into a man". Singh's understanding of evolution here appears based more upon watching old werewolf movies than reading Darwin, but, holding as he does a PhD in Chemistry from Delhi University, he has deemed himself to be "an educated politician" and "a man of science"; something which has allowed him to write a forthcoming book in which he intends to lay out some new, supposedly more 'Hindu', theory of mankind's origins, which will disprove Darwin's mad English ideas once and for all. "Since man has been seen on Earth he has always been a man," Singh has argued, and to prove it he has compiled "a list of around 10 to 15 great scientists of the world" who agreed, including Albert Einstein, who thought no such thing. In



LEFT: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks at the inauguration of the 102nd Indian Science Congress (ISC) in Mumbai on 3 January 2015.

TOSS-POTS AND HELMETS

The position of such a man as Higher Education Minister is somewhat disturbing, given that Singh has argued that the curriculum in India's schools "needs to change" so that Darwin's ideas are dropped (I assume in favour of his own). India's "greatest blunder" since the end of colonialism had been to retain a British-style education system, Singh has said, which must be why school science textbooks themselves are now being openly twisted by Saffronists to suit their agenda. In some BJP-controlled states, Indian secondary-school pupils are now being taught that test-tube babies were first created not by modern-day men in lab-coats, but in India some 7,600 years ago when a Vedic scholar spilled his seed into an earthenware pot after seeing a beautiful female nymph bathing in the Ganges. The baby born from this special hi-tech pot was named Dronacharya, after the old word for such a vessel, *Drona*. And that, kids, is scientific fact; if you say it isn't in an exam, you would, presumably, fail. The eager *Hindutva* student could also bring in the idea of another BJP-endorsed school textbook that it is possible to create stem-cells for later use in human cloning simply by placing a convenient nearby dead baby within a jar of butter, as clearly detailed within the ancient Vedic text of the *Mahabharata*, in which a mythological figure chops an aborted foetus into 100 slices and then stores them away within 100 jars of ghee, inside which they later grow up into a mini-army of 100 early Indian ancestors of the Lurpak Butter-Man.² Future *Hindutva* science textbooks may be even worse, judging by the 102nd Indian Science Congress held in Mumbai in January 2015, the first such meeting following the BJP's election success of 2014. This event started as it meant to go on, with BJP Science and Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan delivering an introductory speech in which he proudly yet incorrectly claimed that Indians (rather than the Arabs) had

NO ONE HAS EVER "SEEN AN APE TURNING INTO A MAN" SAYS SINGH

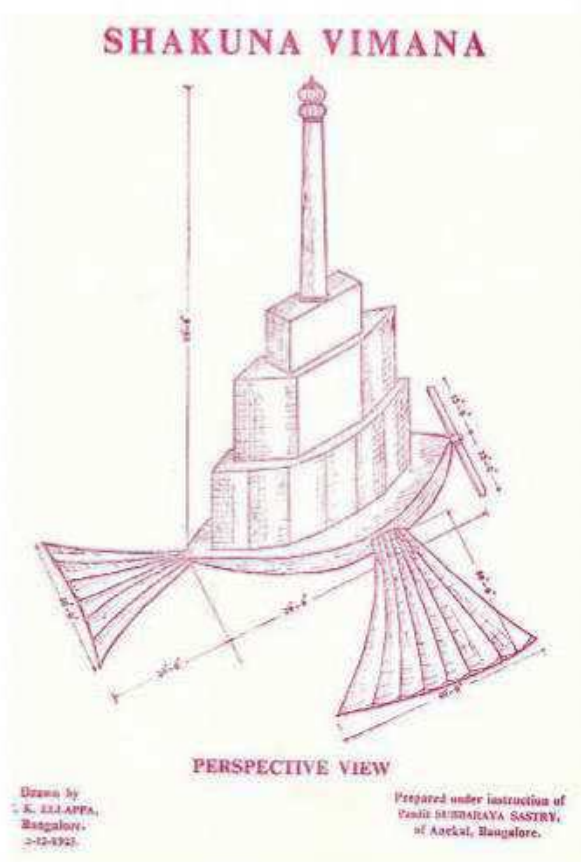
January 2018, Singh announced his intention to organise "an international conference" at which "scientists can come out" as anti-Darwinists, but he was made to call this event off by his BJP Cabinet superior, who politely asked him to "refrain from making such comments" – whereupon he went off and wrote a book about it instead.¹

invented both algebra and Pythagoras's Theorem (rather than, well, Pythagoras). The most talked-about session was devoted to 'Sanskrit Science', and was basically a public forum for ancient astronaut theorists to peddle untruths about Sanskrit texts from India's Vedic period, thousands of years ago, supposedly containing references to futuristic technology. One prominent attendee, Kiran Naik, from a university in Gujarat, had a stall at which he demonstrated some special weather-altering and fog-dispersing rockets he had built, based on descriptions in antique texts, and which were purportedly powered by sugar alone. Naik also speculated that ancient Indians had been able to glue animals' heads onto humans' bodies by heating more such sugar into a hot sticky paste for use in plastic surgery – which, as BJP leader Narendra Modi has also argued, must have been how the god Ganesh ended up with an elephant's head on his shoulders. Naik's oddest claim involved a tale from the *Mahabharata*, in which two Indian kings chase one another to Mars in their spaceships, with one king's helmet falling off during their subsequent combat. According to Naik, NASA had recently discovered this very same abandoned helmet lying about on Mars, directing attendees to images of a roundish object (i.e. a rock) taken from a NASA Mars-probe, which had been misidentified by gullible Westerners online as a WWII Nazi helmet.

These kings' spaceships were *vimanas*, magical flying chariots from Hindu myth, sometimes reclaimed nowadays as being Vedic flying saucers. One conference talk centred entirely upon *vimanas*. It was given by a retired captain named Anand J Bodas, who had scoured Sanskrit texts to create a labelled diagram of what they would have looked like. Apparently, they had 30 engines each, were up to twice as big as a jumbo jet, could fire missiles, possessed the ability to come to a full-stop in mid-air and hover, could travel up, down, forwards, backwards and diagonally, and perform barrel-rolls. Their exhaust-pipes were mechanical elephants' trunks, being flexible and made either of fabric, leather or some special combination of 33 unknown alloys which Bodas urged his audience to try and rediscover by messing about in furnaces. They also had radars which worked on the principle of detecting other enemy aircrafts' auras and were piloted by a race of men who lived off a diet of milk. These interplanetary milk-men wore "magic suits" made from silk, cotton and "underwater plants", which were waterproof and electricity-resistant, and warded off as many as 25 known viruses. Bodas's diagrams of *vimanas* make them look remarkably like fantasy propeller-driven dirigibles from the 19th-century US 'Scareship' panic so beloved of UFO-historians, and maybe this should be



ABOVE: Retired pilot turned author Anand J Bodas caused controversy at the Indian Science Congress with his sensational claims about ancient Indian aviation. ABOVE RIGHT: A diagram of a *vimana*.



no surprise, as Bodas's main textual source, allegedly from 400BC, turned out to have been faked somewhere around the turn of the 1900s, and so was actually more Victorian than Vedic.

The conference sounds like Satyapal Singh's tangerine wet-dream, but did it really have official BJP backing? Well, the specific 'Sanskrit Science' section was opened by the BJP's Environment Minister, Prakash Javadekar, which rather implies it did. After being criticised for promoting what amounted to a UFO convention, however, Javadekar tried his hand at damage-limitation, explaining how he had not bothered to stay to listen to any of the talks, had no prior idea what was going to be said in them, and did not necessarily endorse any of their content.³

A PEACOCK'S TALE

It is not just the education system which is being abused to promulgate theories of so-called 'Hindu Science'. As part of their long counter-march to take back the country's institutions from their supposed post-colonial capture by Marxists (a key motivating belief of some Saffronists), many of India's key positions of civil authority are being occupied, one by one, by *Hindutva* true-believers. Take the judiciary, where nationalist Judge Mahesh Sharma caused a hullabaloo in 2017 by claiming that India's national bird, the peacock, was too "pious" to have sex, with the female instead following a path of "life-long celibacy", reproducing purely by swallowing the male's tears, as detailed in the venerable Indian text of the *Brahma Purana*. "This has been confirmed," Judge Sharma said when later questioned on

live TV. "Ask any animal husbandry director or doctor."

While you're there, you could also ask them about Sharma's other bizarre pseudo-legal decrees concerning those rival Hindu holy animals, cows. According to Sharma, each cow contains 33 million Hindu gods and goddesses living inside it, giving cattle the power to cure all ailments from cancer to cholera, as each such animal "is a hospital in itself", to the extent that its mooing even "kills the pathogens in the air" around it. Herds also exhale oxygen as well as breathing it in, thus aiding the battle against climate-change. Furthermore, drinking their wee "rids one of the sins of the previous life" and slows ageing, he has said, while their horns "absorb cosmic energy". Immediately prior to his retirement in June 2017, Sharma produced a special valedictory 193-page 'judicial' report to hand to the government, demanding it declare the cow to be India's national animal (instead of the rather pointless Bengal tiger), before granting all such blessed beasts the official status of legal persons, thus placing the authorities in a position of *in loco parentis* over them, and forcing the State to care for them (public-funded retirement homes for cows do now actually exist in India, as does an NHS-like cow-ambulance fleet, the Cattle Healing Mobile Van Service). If his words were not heeded by the BJP, Sharma warned, then India might run out of milk.⁴

THE SHIT AND THE PENDULUM

Everyone knows that, for Hindus, cows are quite literally sacred. Fewer people know that, for some Saffronists, so are their turds. So it makes perfect sense that several



LEFT: A cow walks past a special ambulance for cows at the 'Sri Krishna Gaushala' (cow shelter) in New Delhi. LEFT: A pharmacist holds up a bottle of cough syrup made from cow urine.

government-linked Indian scientists and medics have now gone on record claiming that cowpats possess various amazing powers, from curing illness to dispelling radioactivity. In 2011, with Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster still fresh in the memory, the *Times of India* sought advice from KN Uttam, a university physics professor who had previously worked in the Ministry of Science and Technology, about how the Indian public might best protect themselves should one of their own nuclear reactors ever go into meltdown. His advice was simple. Instead of retreating inside a lead-lined bunker, Uttam advised that "traditional methods" of warding off radiation, such as "keeping onions in [your] pockets and applying a layer of cow-dung on the outside walls of houses" would easily "absorb the harmful gamma rays" released, thus rendering a person safe, if perhaps smelly.⁵

A similar myth has since arisen that it is also possible to protect your brain from potentially harmful radiation emitted by your mobile phone, simply by sticking a lump of cow dung to it. In an embarrassing 2016 interview, Shankar Lal, president of an affiliate offshoot of the RSS, the BJP's wider parent *Hindutva* organisation, proudly showed off his shit-smeared phone to reporters, posing for photographs whilst explaining that "all the people in my team, be [they] children, men or women, have cow-dung on their phone" due to its "magical effects" as regards radiation-shielding. The cow, explained Lal, "is our mother", and its poo purest "nectar" which had the power "to save humans from any disease", even phone-cancer. Admittedly, the faeces in question had to come from holy native Indian cows, not "Western monsters like Jersey or Holstein [cattle]", whose "dung and milk are nothing but poison", and it needed to be replaced with a fresh batch once per week, just as "people change phone covers", but the process definitely worked. To prove it,

GETTING PEOPLE TO EAT COWPATS IS CHEAPER THAN CHEMOTHERAPY



Lal held a magic pendulum over an RSS subordinate's hand and pointed out how it began swinging around (perhaps because, as a reporter said, Lal gave it "an initial jerk"). This meant the man was full of cosmic life-force. Then, he gave him a non-shitty phone to hold. This time, the pendulum did not move. This demonstrated how "the phone's harmful waves have sucked all his energy". Swapping the clean phone for a browner one, Lal demonstrated how the pendulum now swung once more: "See, it's moving again... His energy is saved!" So wholesome were cow-turds that Mr Lal liked to actually eat bits of them as free medicine, something he claimed had "kept me healthy even at

the age of 76". He went on to boast that his organisation recommended "making pregnant women eat cow-dung and urine-paste to ensure a normal delivery".⁶

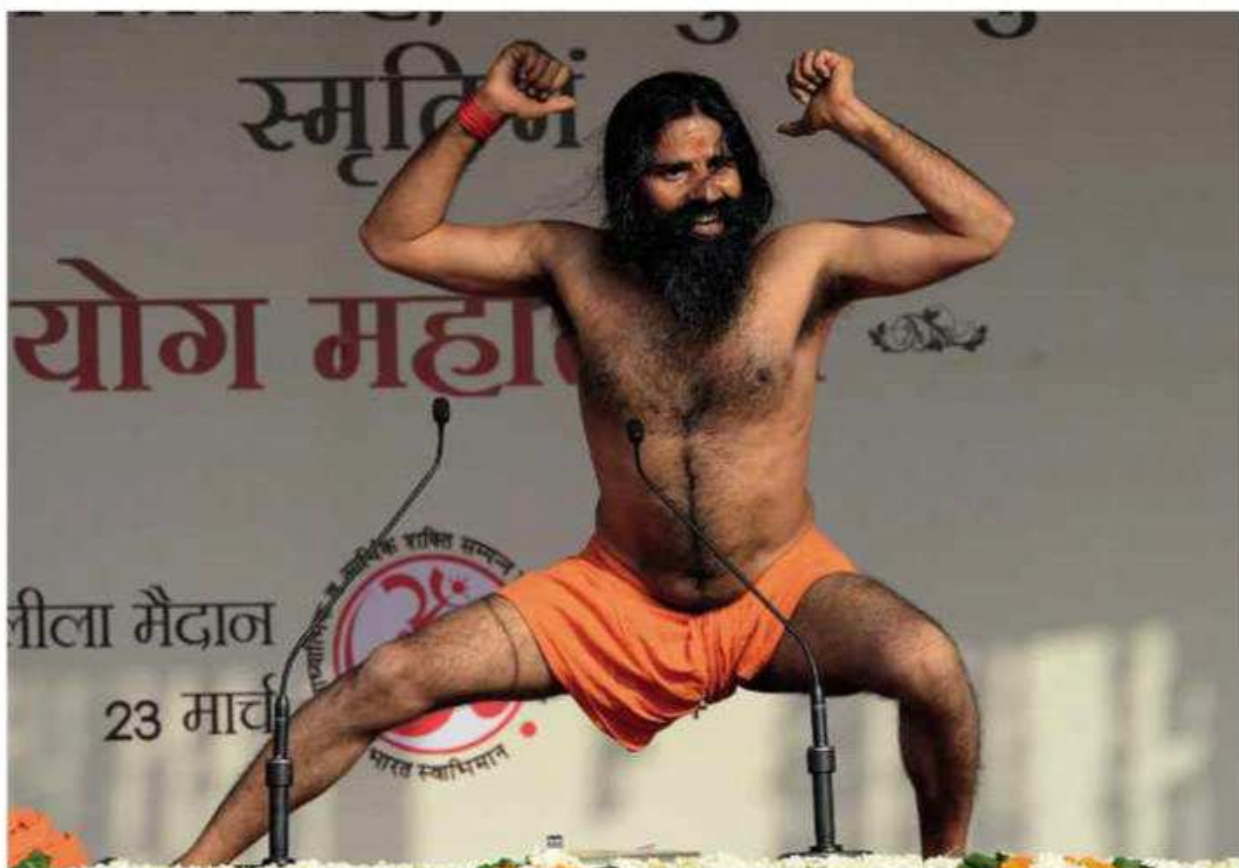
EXTRACTING THE URINE

Lal could legitimately claim only to be following official government advice when willingly swallowing such shite. Since being elected in 2014, the BJP have cut the Indian Health Service's budget by 17 per cent, and a cynic might conclude that their simultaneous campaign to get people to eat cowpats as cure-alls might just be related to the fact that they tend to be cheaper to procure than, say, expensive chemotherapy drugs or supplies of insulin. In 2017, the Indian government set up a national 'scientific' committee called SVAROP, devoted to researching the potential medical effects of consuming something called *panchgavya*, a traditional medicine consisting of cow-milk, cow-poo, cow-wee, milk-curd and ghee-butter, mixed up with coconut-water, sugar-cane juice and banana. To Saffronists, such so-called 'cowpathy', as a branch of ancient Indian alternative medicine termed *ayurveda*, is superior to non-cow-related imperialist Western medicine, with the Government Ayurveda College and Hospital in the BJP stronghold of Uttar Pradesh making recent efforts to promote the daily drinking of bottled cow-urine amongst the general populace, hoping to naturally boost their immune systems and thus prevent them from getting ill in the first place (see FT371:8-9).

According to local *ayurveda* specialist Dr Naresh Chandra Gangwar, "The state has placed an order [with farmers], and besides promoting cow-urine as a health drink, we will start making medicines from it to treat jaundice, piles, cancer, liver-conditions and skin-related problems. Widespread daily consumption of cow-urine will lead to a healthier population." Possibly so, because all the tedious sick people will then die due to lack of proper medicine. And, if they do croak, then in the view of some Saffronists it will be their own fault. Like a Hindu Glenn Hoddle, the BJP Health Minister for Assam, Himanya Biswa Sarma, has cruelly declared that cancer victims are only experiencing "divine justice", with their disease being a deserved karmic punishment for sins committed by them in past lives.⁷

MEDITATE, DON'T MEDICATE

One prominent fan of *ayurveda* is BJP PM Narendra Modi, a Saffronist to his orange-hued fingertips, who has spoken of the need for an *ayurveda* "health revolution" to take place across India. During the colonial "era of slavery", he has said, the British slyly



LEFT: Indian yoga guru Baba Ramdev struts his stuff at the 'Yoga Mahotsav' in New Delhi in March 2014.

made efforts to destroy “India’s strengths” in medicine by introducing remedies which actually worked. Thus, he has called for *ayurveda* hospitals to be set up all across the country in order to bring it “back to nature and wellness”. But an even cheaper way of treating the nation’s sick would be to encourage them to do more yoga, the ancient Indian (though not specifically Hindu) spiritual discipline of physical exercise and meditation of which Modi is a massive fan. Mr Modi allegedly works from 5am to 11pm seven days a week; he credits his amazing stamina partly to his daily yoga regime; footage he has shared online makes him look as though his true government position is not Prime Minister but Head of the Indian Ministry of Silly Walks. You can even download a special app in which an animated Modi tells you how to bend over and adopt various curious positions for your own good. In 2015, Modi had the UN declare every 21 June to be the International Day of Yoga, and the BJP have moved to make its study compulsory in schools, thus simultaneously upsetting Muslims, delighting Hindus and so further shoring up Modi’s core *Hindutva* support base.

In a development dubbed “crony spiritualism”, a strange alliance has been forged between Modi and popular yoga gurus like the saffron-robed TV star Baba Ramdev, who effusively praises the PM, thereby making his millions of followers more likely to vote BJP, and in return appears to be given prime retail space within government-backed shops to flog his ‘spiritual wares’ – including herbal medicine, hair-restorer and toothpaste – to the masses. Ramdev confirms BJP hardliners’ belief that yoga can cure such potentially deadly diseases as hepatitis, asthma and, um, homosexuality. Modi’s own

suggestions that yoga can help beat terrorism and climate change whilst facilitating world peace are hardly less ridiculous, as demonstrated by the fact that, on the very same day he made these happy-clappy claims in 2017, Modi also congratulated his nation’s military for developing a new kind of ballistic missile (probably not powered by sugar) to defend Indian airspace from Pakistan.

Other BJP men have, equally inaccurately, boasted that certain special yoga poses can cure cancer; that yoga will reduce currently ultra-high rates of rape nationwide by “changing the way one feels about the human body”; and that, if you observe them closely enough, you will see that various birds, animals and even insects are constantly adopting yoga poses in the wild. According to BJP Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, farmers performing yoga in front of newly-planted seeds could also make their crops grow better, as this would “empower the seeds with the help of positive thinking”, with pure rays passing out from the human mind and directly into the soil, just like at Findhorn (see **FT217:44-49**). Particularly inflammatory was the claim of former BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi that, when they bow to Mecca, Muslims are accidentally performing yoga moves, as the Prophet Muhammad himself was secretly “a great yogi”.

“Yoga is a journey from me to we,” Narendra Modi has said, praising its alleged ability to dissolve the boundaries of the self and thereby bring people together in love and harmony. But if so, why is the party he leads deliberately abusing fields like history and science to foster ethnic and religious tension across the subcontinent? Perhaps it might be worth Mr Modi meditating on that particular question for a while.

NOTES

1 *Times*, 3 July 2018; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/darwins-theory-scientifically-wrong-union-min-satyapal-singh/articleshow/62581675.cms>; www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/23/indian-education-minister-dismisses-theory-of-evolution-satyapal-singh; quotes from Singh below are also taken from these sources.

2 Some Indian school textbooks now contain ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ descriptions of precisely what constitutes an attractive female, by the way, just so you can know whether or not to knock one out into a nearby jar the next time you see one. *Times*, 30 July 2014; www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/test-tubes-in-hastinapur/291554

3 <https://scroll.in/article/698610/ancient-planes-and-vedic-cloud-seeding-day-2-at-the-indian-science-congress>; <https://scroll.in/article/698616/pilots-in-magic-suits-could-steer-vedic-planes-between-planets-says-paper-at-indian-science-congress>; www.indiatoday.in/india/story/5-howlers-from-the-indian-science-congress-234181-2015-01-05; <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other/ancient-sciences-exhibition-helmet-on-mars-cow-bacteria-make-gold-veg-diet-and-peace/articleshow/45756485.cms>; <http://www.kracktivist.com/gems-from-indian-science-congress-helmet-on-mars-cow-bacteria-to-make-gold-veg-diet-and-peace-wtfnews/>

4 India is actually the largest milk-producer in the world, so Judge Sharma need not fear for the continued edibility of his morning Weetabix on this count. www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cows-exhale-oxygen-absorb-cosmic-energy-home-to-crores-of-gods-what-rajasthan-judge-said/story-vrtIRN9h496l2h9ltnuZtM.html; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-40116001; www.firstpost.com/india/peacock-judge-mahesh-sharma-justifies-views-on-making-cow-indias-national-animal-in-extremely-awkward-interview-3506389.html; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/02/indian-state-launches-ambulance-service-sacred-cows/

5 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/allahabad/Onions-cow-dung-reduce-radiation-impact/articleshow/7801752.cms>

6 One paper delivered at the 2015 Indian Science Congress claimed to prove that special bacteria living within cows’ stomachs could transform their food into golden turds of 24-carat quality, meaning that Indian cow-pats really are worth their weight in gold after all. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/cellphones-suck-energy-just-put-some-cow-dung-rss-ideologue-2958597/>

7 Traditionally, *ayurveda* is supposed to have been transmitted directly down to humanity from the gods. *Times*, 23 Mar 2017; *Private Eye*, 15 Jun 2018; <https://thewire.in/science/panchgavya-svarop-iit-csir-cow-urine>; www.thehindu.com/news/national/benefits-of-cow-urine-science-technology-minister-to-head-panel-with-rss-vhp-members-article19289223.ece; www.altnews.in/bjp-science-ganeshas-plastic-surgery-yoga-can-cure-cancer/

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Bad press for black cats

From deadly mediæval superstitions to the rise of the selfie, black cats have had to overcome an image problem says **DAVID HAMBLING**.

Black cats are strongly associated with Hallowe'en and witchcraft, and people are still superstitious about them. The conventional story is that because cats were worshipped as gods by the Egyptians, they were targeted by the Christian church and identified as witches' familiars. This led to the massacre of cats, causing a profusion of rats, and hence the Black Death. Except that none of this is exactly true.

Black cats are regularly reported as being the hardest to re-home by animal charities. The RSPCA figures for 2015-2017 showed that on average, it took 19 days to rehome a ginger cat, 23 days for a tabby, and 30 days for a black cat. This is often claimed as being due to continuing superstition. An additional complication is that animal shelters sometimes refuse to rehome black cats in the run-up to Hallowe'en.

"This is a time when blood rituals take place," Hedy Litke, director of animal placement at the ASPCA, told the *New York Daily News* in 1999. "Black cats are often sacrificed."

This belief appears to be widespread, although animal charities tend to decline comment. A pervasive urban myth variously blames Wiccans, occultists, Satanists or just "badly-behaved kids" for the cat-killings. Debunking site Snopes looked at a number of stories of alleged sacrifice and found plenty of anecdotal accounts but no documented instances that they actually happened.

Feline sacrifice would be a peculiar reversal; Pagans



supposedly worshipped cats while Christians killed them. As part of the coronation festivities of Elizabeth I, an effigy of the Pope filled with live cats was put on a bonfire. The cats "squealed most hideously as they felt the fire; the common [people] saying... it was the laughter of Pope and Devil in dialogue between them," according to a spectator.¹

The pogrom against black cats is generally supposed to have been started by Pope Gregory IX with a papal bull called *Vox in Rama* ("A voice in Ramah" – quoted from Matthew 2:18) sometime in the 1230s. Pope Gregory was notably harsh on heretics and instituted a papal inquisition. In 1233 inquisitor Konrad von Marburg reported to Gregory that he had uncovered a satanic cult in Mainz, and *Vox In Rama* was issued in response, instructing the local ruler to suppress the cult.

While a document called *Vox in Rama* does exist, it is doubtful

whether it was a papal bull. It describes initiating kissing first a giant toad, and then the statue of a black cat, before blowing the candles out and indulging in an unspeakable and indiscriminate orgy. Afterwards, the Devil appears in semi-human form.

There does not appear to be any evidence of a bull called *Vox In Rama* being issued, hence the confusion over the date. Scholars suggest that *Vox in Rama* was more likely a polemic from one

of von Marburg's circle, described as a bull to increase its influence. Von Marburg was, incidentally, accused of torturing confessions out of innocent people (and was subsequently assassinated), and the cult may never have existed.

Vox in Rama does not even suggest that cats were agents of the Devil, or should be killed. The supposed bull seems to have been picked up by popular historians as a convenient starting point for the anti-cat tradition, a claim repeated endlessly without being checked. The prejudice does not have any single, easily-identifiable source.

Superstitious mediævals certainly killed some cats, but there was no wholesale slaughter. Nor were most witches' familiar spirits feline in form. An analysis of 207 witch trials from 1563 to 1705 showed that cats were involved in 50 cases, followed closely in popularity by dogs and toads. Other alleged familiars included beetles, mice, hares, moles, wasps and even a butterfly

and a crab. The high frequency of cats and dogs may simply reflect how common they were in households and, therefore, how often they were seen with a supposed witch. If all cats had been killed, it is hard to see how so many people would have had one.

The absence of a feline genocide also makes a nonsense of the argument that lack of cats was responsible for bubonic plague carried by rat fleas; the same plague also decimated India and Persia, where there was no cat persecution at all.

However, the reason for black cats' continuing unpopularity may have more to do with social media than mediæval superstition. Black cats are photographically challenged, often appearing as a cat-shaped silhouette in anything except strong lighting, making them difficult subjects for the Instagram era. This has led to an any-colour-but-black preference among prospective cat owners.

"It's an increasing problem," Christine Baker of rehoming centre The Moggery told the *Telegraph* earlier this year. "Now everybody wants to take selfies and put them on Facebook."

Technology may yet save the day. Better camera phones make even the blackest cat stand out better, and their devilish charisma makes them natural social media stars. The Marvel movie *Black Panther* has also allegedly boosted the popularity of black cats. After centuries of persecution, it's about time.

¹ "Correspondence of the Family Hatton, 1601-1704", quoted in "Glaring at Anti-Christ: Anti-Papal Images in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1680"

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Wrecking ball in the Demon House

SHARON A HILL argues that the antics of celebrity ghost hunters only derail legitimate attempts to investigate reports of the supernatural.

In his 2018 documentary film *Demon House*, Zak Bagans calls himself “one of the world’s leading researchers on ghosts and demonology”. How he acquired this accolade is one of many unsupported claims made in this less-than-objective project styled as a ‘paranormal investigation’. Bagans is an American ‘para-celeb’ who stars in the Travel Channel TV series *Ghost Adventures*. By the end of this film, legitimate researchers may conclude that although Bagans keeps using the word ‘research’ it doesn’t mean what he thinks it does. The efforts he makes in this “investigation” ultimately end up in destruction of the location and a generally atrocious viewing experience.

Demon House is Bagans’s personal investigation into the Gary, Indiana, house occupied from 2011 to 2013 by Latoya Ammons, her mother, and her three children, who say they experienced demon-related activity there and in other locations (see Bob Rickard, “A Very Modern Haunting”, FT313:46-53). Bagans purchased the house unseen, days after a 2014 story about the Ammons family troubles appeared in the *Indianapolis Star*.¹ The experiential claims sounded like tropes from a Hollywood horror script – strange shadows, phantom footsteps, levitation, physical assault by an invisible force, and a swarm of flies. A key incident occurred in the hospital where a social worker, a psychologist, and the family claimed to witness the nine-year-old boy walk backwards up the wall. However, the cautionary details revealed



ABOVE: The house in Gary, Indiana, at the centre of the alleged demonic activity; it has since been torn down by Bagans.

by the *Star* were eclipsed by the sensational aspects regarding demon possession in Bagans’s film.

Medical and case records referencing these claims, obtained by the *Star* with permission, showed that the family doctor and the Department of Child Services believed the family members were suffering from delusions and psychological stress. An objective observer would have readily noted that this did not appear to be a well-adjusted, stable family. The kids were playing truant from school, which prompted the repeated involvement of the police and child protective services. The children’s behaviour – fighting, aggressive speech, rolling eyes and heads, guttural voices, growling, seeing and hearing things – could be the result of acting out internal conflicts,

This did not appear to be a well-adjusted, stable family

reacting to external suggestions, and attention-seeking. In response to one child’s behaviour, the grandmother told him: “You’re not my grandson, you’re a demon.” It appears the children took this literally. The examining psychologists also noted Ammons’s strong religiosity and belief in demons as problematic. Since Ms Ammons firmly believed demons were responsible for the children’s behaviour, consulting psychics and church officials who reinforced this belief, she sought solutions in

religious rituals instead of using parental discipline. One credulous priest, Father Maginot, performed multiple exorcisms on Ms Ammons. Ammons refused to participate in Bagans’s film (said to be related to agreements for another media project), so it was never explained why she received the ritual when the children were more obviously affected. According to interviews she gave to the media, she accepted that she was possessed by demons that originated in the house.² Soon after the hospital wall-walking incident, social services temporarily removed the children from Ammons’s custody. The obvious potential for the children’s behaviour and anomalous observations to be misinterpreted in the framework of this occult belief was ignored by Bagans, who has expressed his own conviction about demon



LEFT: Zak Bagans hangs onto his hat whilst exploring the ‘cursed’ property in *Demon House* and talks about his haunted life in a 2015 book.

possession.

Bagans’s research protocol for this case consisted of witness interviews, review of documents, contracting a home inspector, and anomaly hunting. Though the home inspector had some concerns about the condition of the house, including potential carbon monoxide issues, these were passed over. Anything that could be connected to the idea of demons was used in support of a preferred supernatural cause: Bagans’s own dream about a goat-headed demon (“I know this was some serious shit that meant something”), a warning from psychic friends, onsets of illness, EVP and EMF readings, sightings of black shadows, radio interference, and sounds of growling. Random objects discovered in a dirt patch under the basement led Father Maginot and Bagans to believe that someone had conducted a ritual to open a portal to Hell, releasing an evil that subsequently plagued the family. Bagans brings in a parapsychologist, Dr Barry Taff, who does not provide much insight before he is affected by health issues, which also suddenly hit Bagans and his film crew. Emphasised throughout the film is the idea that the evil can follow you from the house: one of the film crew is shown losing his grip on reality in a hotel corridor after an unsettling experience, and some police officers are scared to enter the house for fear that whatever is in there will attach itself to them. Bagans connects

the demon of his dream to all these diverse accidents and illnesses that befall people connected with the house, including the attempted suicide of a teen girl who once visited it. The incidents are ripped from their context and pasted into Bagans’s melodramatic narrative. The suicide attempt, in particular, is exploitative and disturbing, as the girl is filmed being brought to Maginot’s church, where she looks tired and acts withdrawn. The clear intention is to suggest that the teenager’s misfortunes were due to the presence of supernatural forces.

Bagans and his crew conclude that whatever evil is in the house has followed them out and subsequently cursed the film. He attributes his problems with the production of the film to this corrupting dark energy. Bagans, as the star, decides to conduct a “lockdown” on his own. His crew board him up in the house overnight, and the audience is subjected to the display of a fear junkie freaking himself out, the same gimmick used for entertainment effect in many reality TV-type paranormal programmes. He rages at some furnishings, sees shadows, and perhaps hears sounds; it’s not clear what is genuine footage and what has been enhanced or manufactured for effect. He also complains of an excruciating pain in his head. Later, he tells viewers he’s been diagnosed with diplopia, or double vision. In a *Den of Geek* interview (Sokol, 2018), he says the medical

cause of the sudden onset of the condition, which he claims still to be suffering from, was undetermined. For a critical examination of the claims and incidents shown in the film, see “Demon House Deconstructed” by investigator Kenny Biddle.³

For the film’s finale, Bagans has the house torn down (see FT340:23) – a perplexing and frustrating action to those of us who hoped for further study of the environment and the supposed incidents that took place there. Other investigators had not been allowed in to examine the building. In the end, then, the only documentation of Bagans’s own research appears to be this creatively edited, incomplete, and factually inconsistent film, a poor substitute for a thorough case study. Bagans defends his decision to destroy the house in heroic terms: “I used my professional knowledge and experience to make my decision that I wanted to destroy it. Why would I want to put more people, investigators, in harm’s way?”⁴ My own interpretation would be that Bagans’s interest extended only as far as his own personal agenda, and did not encompass any effort to gain reliable knowledge and further understanding. Significantly, he saved the basement stairs and some of the dirt to display in his Las Vegas Haunted Museum.

The evidence presented in this condensed documentary format is inconsistent and far too questionable to support Bagans’s astounding conclusion that demons

were responsible – a conclusion itself reached by indulging in uncritical acceptance of witnesses whose testimony was motivated and perhaps biased by belief and the lure of media attention, and, with reference to the film crew, exaggerated for the camera. Clues from the original news report, along with comments from those involved, reveal that the demonic theme was introduced by the adults in the house early on, imposed on the children, accepted by some officials open to belief, promoted by the media, and ultimately exploited by Bagans to further his standing as a ‘paranormal celebrity’. But the demonic cause was never firmly established, and arguably could never be, as it is faith-based.

The whole case is yet another example of how deliberate, thoughtful and careful examinations of claims of the paranormal are sidelined by the value of such claims as entertainment. By closing off legitimate investigation to produce this hackneyed, overblown film, Bagans ensured that any opportunity to serve the wider agenda of research into paranormal experiences was lost. He neglected to dig deeper into the story to discover whether some of the people involved were the real demons in this tale. I suspect that they were.

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◆ SHARON A HILL is the author of *Scientific Americans: The Culture of Amateur Paranormal Researchers* (McFarland, 2017).

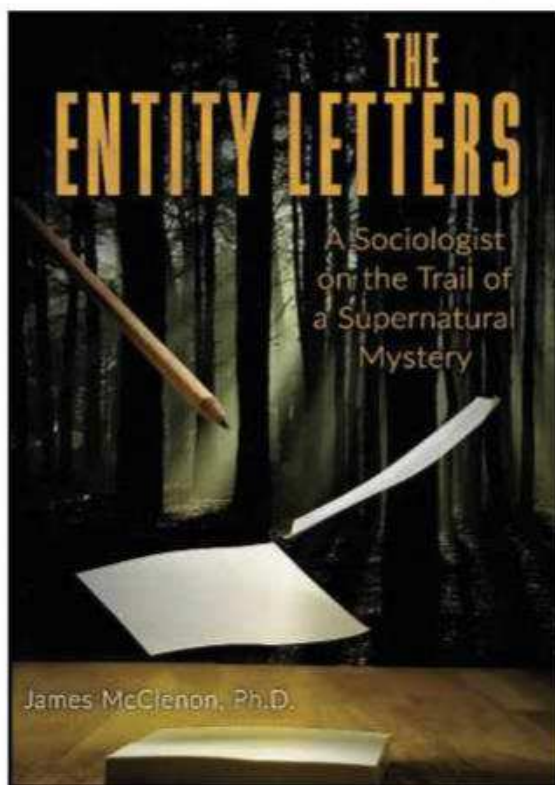
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

38. MERRIMENTS AND MYSTERIES IN MISSOURI

Missouri's nickname is the 'Show Me State', and it features on its vehicle registration plates. One origin for the phrase is credited to Congressman Willard Vandiver, who said in 1899: "I come from a state that raises corn and cotton... and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I'm from Missouri, and you have got to show me." There's also a saying, "I'm from Missouri" – meaning "I'm sceptical, not easily convinced." From 1961 or so, and until at least 2007, many a weird psychokinetic thing occurred in Missouri under the auspices of SORRAT, the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis (see FT148:40, 300:18-19, 331:48-49). These were so weird, indeed, that few people anywhere, never mind Missourians, were convinced they were genuine, no matter what they were shown. Yet the phenomena the group reported, and in many cases recorded on film, are so complex that it is difficult to write the whole thing off as simple fraud – or even complicated fraud for that matter.

There are three fat books written by SORRAT participants: 'Tom' Richards's history of SORRAT from 1961 to 1981, W 'Ed' Cox's highly detailed but rather dull account of the 'minilab' experiments thereafter, mostly at Dr Richards and his wife Elaine's house in Rolla, and James McClenon's *The Entity Letters*, which was first completed in 1988, then expanded and updated in 2017. We're concentrating on this last – or trying to – partly because Dr McClenon is a sociologist, anxious to be objective and, unlike Richards and Cox, was not a central driver of the group's agenda. Cox's involvement took off in 1978, when he retired from a career in radio production (although he had been involved in psi research since the 1930s), moved to Rolla, and worked more or less full-time with the Richardses. Tom Richards was part of SORRAT from the beginning. Cox was preoccupied with proving the reality of psychokinesis, and was studiously neutral about the 'entities' that produced the effects he observed, and consistently calls them 'the agency' or 'agencies'. Richards, on the other hand, along with group founder Professor John G Neihardt and other SORRATs (as they referred to themselves), was interested in the phenomena as proof of life after death. The key to producing psychokinetic phenomena was *rapport*, or agreement and harmony within the group. It was not considered unreasonable to kick-start genuine phenomena – mostly standard table-tipping, levitating, and raps – with stuff fraudulently and surreptitiously produced. This is not that hard to do. The



problem is knowing when to stop. Many of SORRAT's critics have suggested it never did stop, although some concede it may have continued unconsciously or when certain sitters were in trance. And it is very difficult to prove that a lightweight card table photographed in mid-air is actually there of its own (psychokinetic) accord, or has just been tossed aloft by human hands and caught on film the moment before it falls.

Hence the minilab, an idea suggested in 1969 it seems by JB Rhine, pioneer psi researcher of Duke University. At its simplest, this was an upturned aquarium tank, sitting on a heavy base, and sealed to prevent interference with the contents.

At Tom Richards's house, it was kept in the basement, in a locked 'isolation room'. As time went by, the minilab became more complex and more secure (and larger): heavy steel bands held the tank to the sealed base and were padlocked, with the keyholes plugged with glue; plastic string was knotted and melted in strategic places; and Cox made secret marks in various places to detect any interference. He insists throughout his book that, no matter what had happened inside the minilab, everything was in order later, with no sign of tampering (his favourite phrase is "locked and sealed minilab", which soon becomes tedious). Unfortunately, and rather bizarrely, he failed to take before-and-after photographs to prove his point. Various objects, such as pen and paper, or seamless leather rings, were set on microswitches, so that if anything moved, the switches would activate an 8mm camera and turn on lights, so that odd activity could be filmed. On the face of it, the system worked perfectly (you can see a stack of SORRAT films on YouTube). Among the extraordinary events recorded were:

- A candle igniting of its own accord inside the sealed minilab. Film also shows paper bursting into flames by itself.
- Spoons, forks and plain strips of metal left inside the minilab were distorted, apparently by psychokinesis.
- There were many instances of pens taking it upon themselves to write messages without the intervention of any human agency, and at extraordinary speed. Cox estimated that direct writing occurred at twice the average human writing speed. The quality of the messages received varied from the banal through the metaphysical to the unashamedly jokey.
- SORRAT films show momentary interlinking of leather rings (each cut from a single piece of hide). Messages from Cox and Richards to the 'agency' persistently requested this achievement to be made permanent, but to no avail. One directly written response said testily: "We've tried, but can't make the damn leather rings stay linked – sorry." In 1985, a metallurgist known only as Donald C created two rings of a unique metal alloy whose formula only he knew. During an (unfilmed) experiment

at Neihardt's Skyrim Farm, the rings linked – and stayed that way. According to Dr Richards: "Careful laboratory analysis shows that there is no cut or break in the metal of either ring."

- Letters were extracted from – and *through* the envelopes containing them, although the envelopes (and, of course, the minilab) clearly remained sealed as the paper came forth.

- Sealed sets of Zener cards, fresh from the makers and packed in random order, were left in the minilab, and the 'agencies' asked to call the order of the cards. Responses were acquired through paranormal rapping, direct writing, and other means, and in about one attempt in three were absolutely accurate for the whole run of the pack.

- Possibly the most controversial of all SORRAT's claims is that objects were placed inside the sealed minilab and then appeared elsewhere with no human intervention. Materials as varied as pipecleaners, water, matchbooks, peas, mica sheets, string, jewellery, film, and paper transported themselves in or out of minilabs. Films show such items appearing and disappearing and, yet more astonishing, actually *passing through the glass* of the sealed container. Such events led the experimenters to leave sealed, addressed, but unstamped letters inside the minilab to discover whether or not they would find their way to their intended destinations. They did. Often the letters were adorned with unusual postage stamps – South American, Italian and Australian ones were attached to the envelopes.

- In another experiment, Cox pre-recorded a cassette from beginning to end with the sound of a clock ticking. He left this tape in the minilab, without a recorder. When it was retrieved and played, the tape also now held the sound of a series of paranormal raps – but the sound of the ticking clock had not been erased.

How to account for all this, if one isn't entirely convinced by the notion of psychokinesis? The die-hard sceptics' answers don't quite cut the psychic mustard. One of their fallback positions is that someone – the chief suspect being Tom Richards – was using stop-motion to get his 'special effects' on film. Granted, there were problems in principle with the camera. It was a cheap clockwork affair and sometimes didn't work because the mechanism had wound down. It should have been electrically powered, and video (widely available by the late 1970s) should have been used, not crappy 8mm film. There should also have been at least one more camera, giving a wide-angle view of the 'isolation room', running constantly. Maybe a couple more, at right angles to each other. And the minilab should have been in the centre of the room, filmed fore and aft, not stuck up against a wall. It is passing strange that Cox did not think of these things – none of which, surely, were beyond his resources or his brain-power.



LEFT: A table seemingly levitates in a photograph taken by a SORRAT participant.

"A GOOD TREE
IS BETTER
THAN MOST
OF THE BOOKS
INTO WHICH
IT MIGHT BE
MADE."

John King

Nonetheless, it would have been incredibly time-consuming to have unsealed and resealed the minilab, given the number of apparent PK events that were filmed – not to mention meanwhile creating the thousands of letters that the 'entities' sent. And how *does* one fake objects passing through glass? Sundry 'explanations' for the paranormal raps have been offered, but these tend to wither when raps were heard under concrete or dirt in the Richardses' garden – unless in addition to teaching, practising with his pistols (a major interest), and writing (plus of course managing all that fraud with the letters and the minilab) Tom and Elaine managed – without being noticed by anyone – to build some elaborate underground contraption or other to create the effects. It doesn't really add up. But then neither does psychokinesis.

James McClenon came to Rolla to gather material for his PhD thesis on the sociology of PK sitter groups, and found himself, somewhat against his will, being sucked into the atmosphere of the Rolla group. He seems to have found Ed Cox creepy and overbearing at first, burning with missionary zeal, and not a little angry that his hard work was being somewhat snootily denigrated by his peers.

McClenon's attitude softened toward Cox, but he plainly remains baffled by the SORRAT phenomena (as who might not be) while remaining sympathetic to PK and poltergeist effects as such. What he can do, he does: accepts that *something* is happening, and notes the conditions under which it occurs. Among other things he observed that close observation tends to inhibit phenomena (which might well kybosh our multi-camera scenario above). One infers that such close and constant checking interferes with the rapport that seems so crucial to sitter-group activity and experiment. One way the 'entities' strengthened rapport was through their answers to questions. A SORRAT might ask for a written answer to some enquiry, and the answer would be sent (through the mail, with the usual addition of exotic stamps) to another member of the group, reinforcing their bonds.

One also gets the impression that the 'entities', assuming they have or had an existence independent of the sitters, were – unlike the SORRATs – not too concerned to prove they were real, although they persisted in insisting that they had once had earthly existences – "in the meat" as they sometimes put it. They were an ambiguous bunch. Prominent among them was 'John King', supposedly a pseudonym (why bother?) of Henry Owen Morgan (c.1635–88), privateer and sometime governor of Jamaica, who as King had cropped up as numerous mediums' control in the 19th and early 20th centuries. King's alleged daughter Katie (Morgan had no recorded children) was the materialisation (or doppelgänger) of the youthful medium Florence Cook, *protégée* and perhaps enthusiastic humper of Sir William Crookes (see FT179:30-37). Another frequent communicator was known as 111x111, although there seems to have been a consensus among SORRATs that this was a manifestation of Ed Cox's subconscious (he does not acknowledge this in his book).

As evidence of the afterlife or even of psychokinesis, the SORRAT saga is a puzzle and a mess. McClenon doesn't shy away from this, and recognises the tricksterish nature of the phenomena and, to an extent, those involved. His is the most reader-friendly, even endearing, and probably most honest of the three books discussed here. A must-have for the average fortean's bookshelf. The others are for completists.

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Fairies take to the witches' brooms

After a period of dumbing down and the commercial exploitation of fairies (thanks, Disney), a new generation of enthusiasts are investigating fairies' relationships with witches and shamanism

Magical Folk

Simon Young & Ceri Houlbrook, eds.

Gibson Square 2018

Hb, illus, notes, £16.99, ISBN 9781783341016

The study of fairies depends on reports from people who have had experiences of fairies and the implications of those 'close encounters', to use the ufological parallel. A belief in the reality of fairies may not be necessary, since we can find encounters which have taken the witness completely by surprise. Nevertheless, alongside the archive of narratives of encounters with fairies, there is a complementary field of study of beliefs in and about fairies that draws upon anthropology, geography, cultural and sociological contexts as well as 'official' theories about the nature and existence of fairies provided by religion, Theosophy, Spiritualism and folklore.

The scholarly study of fairies has, until recently, endured a gauntlet of ignorance, derision, superstition and academic neglect. Yet people report seeing them, regardless of whether anyone else takes them seriously. Are they mad? Fraudulent? Are they so easily deceived by misidentification of some natural phenomenon? Significantly, a typical fairy witness tries to test whether their experience is an illusion, only to realise that the intensity, apparent reality, startling behaviour of the entities and overall strangeness of their experience has affected them emotionally.

Centuries of myth, lore and tradition inform our mental picture of what fairies are, but there is nothing standard about fairies. They manifest in such varying sizes, forms, and behaviour that it is sometimes

difficult to see that their relationship to locality is that of the anciently respected *genius loci*.

During the Victorian era, there was a degree of public awakening to the subject, the highlights of which were the blooming of folklore as a subject for academics and the publication of works such as those of Evans-Wentz, Hartland and Yeats.

After WWI, the burgeoning of Spiritualism and Blavatsky's Theosophy provided a 'modern' and more acceptable foundation for the very ancient belief that fairies were somehow associated with the dead. It is no coincidence that photography was quickly assimilated to both Spiritualism and fairy-hunting (*vide* the Cottingley fairy pictures, which came to light via the Theosophists). At the same time, a strand of rationalism interpreted fairylore as a folk-memory of encounters with long-vanished Picts or even extinct races of dwarves. After WWII, British folklorists returned fairy studies to the sphere of cultural and social heritage.

In the mid-20th century, the barely-understood forms of British and Irish fairies were led off to Hollywood, where they were deprived of their ancient aura of spiritual and physical menace and re-shaped for commercial exploitation. The French folklorist Michel Meurger has elsewhere highlighted how Disney recruited Nordic writers and artists, steeped in the folklore of central and northern Europe, to provide authentic imagery for their most famous cartoon movies.

The Fairy Investigation Society (FIS) was founded in 1927; but, from 1950 it was developed and

"Narratives of encounters with fairies never went away; they were simply unreported"

run by its secretary Marjorie T Johnson; and in its last years by the encyclopædist Leslie Shepard (an early supporter of *FT*). A tireless propagandist for the reality of fairies, Johnson and her FIS colleagues instigated an ambitious project to collect British accounts of sightings from published records, recorded folklore narratives and from readers' letters in newspapers. In 2013, Simon Young, this book's main editor (an historian and a regular contributor to *FT*), established *The Fairyist* (fairyist.com) as a rallying point for modern interest in the topic. As he took up the challenge of locating the files of the defunct FIS, Young explained that "the old FIS was exclusively for those who believed in fairies; the new FIS is a secular version for all those who have an interest in fairylore, be they believers or ultra-sceptics".

After finding the FIS archives, Young finished Johnson's work by completing the publication of *Seeing Fairies: From the Lost Archives of the Fairy Investigation Society, Authentic Reports of Fairies in Modern Times* in 2014. The following year, Young and his colleagues launched the most extensive poll and survey of matters to do with fairies and fairylore, including welcoming accounts of sightings, since

Johnson's FIS poll 60 years previously.

The double-whammy of dumbing-down and commercial exploitation proved a major turn-off for academic interest in genuine fairy encounters and, inevitably, the general public were lulled into regarding the subject as one for children with over-active imaginations, minds too dull to discern errors of perception, or stolid types who were way too credulous. Narratives of encounters with fairies never really went away; they were – as happened throughout human history – simply unreported. Or if they were, it was to local newspapers, or as sub-texts in other accounts of rural life, or hiding beneath the words of accounts in (for example) the Celtic languages (Gaelic, Cornish, Welsh).

Today the situation is different and developing along several

exciting fronts. First, there is a recognition of the relationship between fairies and witches. Fresh light on the nature of witches' familiars seems to show they and fairies are fairly interchangeable (although witches

tended to use demons for the Devil's work and fairies for influencing natural processes). The rump of this process is evident, for example, in the Irish tradition of Fairy Doctors who mediate between human society and the fairies, filling, in all other respects, the traditional role of witches. Secondly, there is a shift in emphasis from studies of superstition and belief to studies of authentic narratives of claimed personal experience.

Continued on p60



Mirage men and disinfo

Super-bombs, ray guns, mind games... SF was not a patch on the real-world Cold War weirdness, suggests this gripping book

Rockets and Ray Guns

The Sci-Fi Science of the Cold War

Andrew May

Springer Books 2018

Pb, 214pp, illus, refs, £19.99, ISBN 9783319898292

The Cold War is usually defined as the period of bitter ideological and military rivalry between the Soviet Union and the West that lasted from the late 1940s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. An uneasy peace existed in Europe whilst the superpowers faced each other off in proxy conflicts around the globe. Many who grew up during those anxious times will remember the ever-present threat of a nuclear war breaking out by design or accident.

I did not fully appreciate until I read Andrew May's book how new technologies such as the rockets that took astronauts to the Moon, super-computers and atomic weapons emerged from the rivalry that grew between scientists in the East and West. In the USA this occurred despite opposition from reactionary elements in the military. These tensions came to a head in October 1957, when the Sputnik crisis persuaded the American establishment that science had to be taken seriously in order to beat the Russians who were, then, ahead in the space race.

Some of the new technology that emerged from the Cold War sounded like fiction even to the scientists at the forefront of research and development. Ernest Rutherford and Albert Einstein, for instance, dismissed suggestions that atomic theory could ever have any practical use. In this case, as May reveals, life appears to have imitated art. The use of uranium in nuclear fission that was central to

the Manhattan Project was imagined in contemporary science fiction, such as the short story 'Deadline', by Cleve Cartmill, published in 1944 by *Astounding Science Fiction*. The plot, inspired by guesswork, was so close to the truth that Cartmill and editor John W Campbell were visited by FBI agents who feared there had been leaks from the top secret project. The terrifying reality of the atomic bomb was worse than anything previously imagined by science fiction writers such as HG Wells.

May tells the Cold War story in an engaging and enthusiastic style, and his book is peppered with



insights drawn from his background in science, academia and defence. The seven chapters cover super-bombs, journeys into space, the rise of computers, ray guns and lasers, mind games and what he calls Weird Science: classified military projects on UFOs, remote viewing and super-soldiers. Each chapter compares and contrasts the realworld science of the Cold War and its classified military projects with the worlds imagined by science fiction writers. The interactions between the two changed the public perception of science and scientists. But in hindsight, the literature of the period was not always either accurate or consistent when it came to lofty predictions about future developments in science and technology.

Many assumed that once humans had landed on the Moon, we would quickly push on to Mars, Jupiter and beyond. That we have got no further 50 years later and even retreated back to Earth recalls Arthur C Clarke's "hazards of prophecy", of which May lists many examples. Lasers never came anywhere near the imagined

promise of the death ray or even the phasers used in *Star Trek*. But the Mirage Men on both sides were quick to play up the idea of hi-tech weapons for disinformation purposes during the later years of the Cold War to fool enemies with rumours of far-out technologies such as anti-gravity. This strategy continues in what is often called Cold War 2. Donald Trump's 'Space Force', for instance, draws comparisons with Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative that was immediately dubbed 'Star Wars' by the media.

The most obvious failure of science fiction prophesying was a development that has changed all of our lives: the silicon revolution. May's chapter on super brains surveys a literature filled with stories about giant computers, such as Asimov's Multivac, that relied upon relays and vacuum tubes. The transistor and the micro-technology that allows us to carry our own super-computers around in the form of smart-phones seems to have been a concept too far even for the geniuses like Philip K Dick, whose writing careers bookended the Cold War.

This is an entertaining and enlightening read for anyone with an interest in science, technology and space exploration. The author's extensive knowledge and multi-disciplinary approach to his subject matter is a refreshing change from the dry histories of the Cold War that concentrate upon the military, economic and political factors but often ignore the role of human imagination.

The book is illustrated with pulp magazine and pop culture imagery. My only criticism is the lack of an index makes it difficult for the reader to cross-reference topics of interest.

David Clarke

★★★★★

Continued from p59

Thirdly, there is growing acceptance of the hypothesis of parallels between the person at the heart of the fairy encounter (especially someone who regularly interacts with fairies, such as the Fairy Doctors) and those we might call spontaneous shamans. Technically, 'shamanism' applies to the ecstatic mediums of Siberia, but anthropological studies of cultures worldwide show people on the fringes of local societies undergoing processes corresponding to the 'election' of a shaman, his behaviour, his relationship with 'supernatural entities', his use of psychoactive concoctions, and ecstatic journeys to the Otherworld.

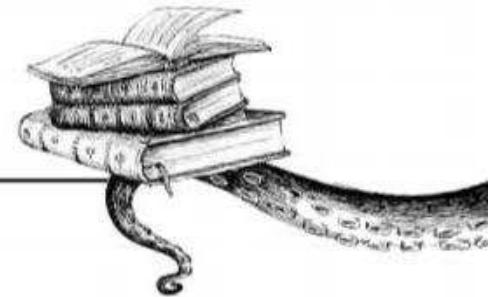
Experiences with some witches, and encounters with fairies, demons or today's aliens, all display elements of shared phenomenology, ontology, epistemology and eschatology. In other words, fairy experiences can be legitimately studied as authentic (if unusual) ways of interacting with the world.

To some extent, this expansion of fairylore studies is due to post-WWII folklorists who are not bogged-down in narrow academic debates, but are willing to enlarge the subject by importing data, insights and methods from the arts, sciences and social sciences.

The new folklorists are positioned – like fortune tellers – to make the most of the increasing number of newspaper archives that are digitised and available online. Data-miners are unearthing the fascinating new narratives included here, many never before accessible to scholars.

Magical Folk is the first wholly new study of British and Irish fairylore in more than half a century. The first 14 papers explore different geographical or cultural regions of Britain and Ireland. The last three follow the belief across the Atlantic to examine the relocated fairy believers in New England, the eastern coast of Canada and Irish America.

We now know that each wave of rural immigrants to the New World – especially after the Scottish Highland clearances and the great famine that triggered the Irish diaspora – took their



beliefs and traditions with them. That these beliefs (and the experiences they inform) are still active in the imagination of their modern descendants was memorably demonstrated by David Hufford's 1982 study of the experience of being 'hag-ridden' (i.e. 'night paralysis', in *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, 1982). The contributions in *Magical Folk* show, similarly, that fairies – whatever they may be or represent – are still at work in the collective imagination.

This book is a perfect example of a revitalising folklore, even more so now that encounters with fairies, demons, aliens and poltergeists can be seen as different cultural adaptations that share a similar spectrum.

I congratulate Dr Young and his colleagues for breathing new life into this venerable subject, shining new light upon what we call 'experience anomalies'. *Magical Folk* is an early taste of the success of the 'Fairysts'; this time not so much from those who see fairies as from the new generation of academics, folklorists and others who think about them and what they mean.

Regrettably, there is no index, but this can be remedied in a new edition. It is, nevertheless, vital and exciting reading for fortune tellers and we look forward to further volumes.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

The Work of the Dead

A Cultural History of Mortal Remains

Thomas W Laqueur

Princeton University Press 2015

Pb, 711pp, illus, bib, ind, £30.00, ISBN 978069118093-9

Cemetery tourism, war memorials, ghost stories, and urns on mantelpieces all tell the same tale: although we think of the dead as gone, they are actually all around us, still playing an active role in our society.

In *The Work of the Dead*, Thomas W Laqueur examines the changing nature of this work in western Europe from the Middle Ages to the modern day.

Central to his narrative is the idea that although the work of the dead – the role that the bodies, monuments and narratives of dead people play in society – changes over time, the fact that this work exists is constant. It remains constant even during periods of change in belief, such as the Reformation, that would theoretically suggest it should end.

After an introduction outlining the concept of the ongoing work of the dead, Laqueur separates his discussion of the idea into four main parts: the deep time of the dead, place and space, the names of the dead, and ashes. These categories are both conceptual and roughly historical. As a starting point, Laqueur takes the question of Diogenes, the ancient philosopher who challenged beliefs about the proper treatment of the dead, by suggesting that his body be given to scavengers since he would no longer be using it. This idea seems as fundamentally challenging to us as it did to Diogenes's contemporaries, even though we're much more likely to believe that the dead person really is no longer using their body. If they're not using it, then,

someone must be – and that someone is us.

Laqueur offers a sweeping history of changing views toward the social persistence of the dead, beginning with ancient and mediæval examples and working through the changing landscape of churchyards and cemeteries, culminating in the widespread transition to cremation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Laqueur builds a compelling picture of the social role of the dead from these examples, showing the way in which a changing society used the commemoration of the dead to define itself and its ideals.

The Work of the Dead is a richly detailed analysis of a fascinating series of transitions in Western society. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of death and dying; even for those who already know this history in outline, it provides a wealth of new detail and insightful analysis. It focuses mainly on the changing role of the dead in the development of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment culture, and readers mainly interested

in mediæval and Renaissance history may wish for a little more detail. For a volume that weighs in at a hefty 700-plus pages, though, that's a very minor complaint.

The Work of the Dead is a clear, compelling history and analysis of a fascinating subject.

James Holloway

★★★★★

Embracing the Darkness

A Cultural History of Witchcraft

John Callow

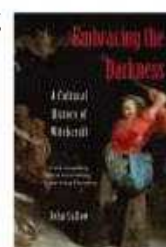
IB Tauris 2018

Hb, 263pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781845114695

John Callow's cultural history of witchcraft is a wonderful read. An historian with several books on witchcraft and on the 17th century, Callow is an enthusiastic writer who draws you along with him.

He begins with an archetypal witch. Mother Redcap or Mother Damnable is known from 17th and 18th century prints, but was "a composite figure" from as early as the 1590s. In a 1793 engraving she is "a filthy, wrinkled crone, crouching beside a cold hearth... thoroughly degraded and degrading". Reality had to follow image: "It mattered little what [they] really did or said: what mattered to their contemporaries was that they looked like witches, and that they were, therefore, expected to fit the role and play the part."

Fitting the role is part of the horrific story of one powerful man responsible for the deaths of over 600 people. In 1627 Prince Bishop Johann Georg built the Hexenhaus, a detention house for suspected witches, in Bamberg, Bavaria. The "confessions" of those confined there, Callow writes, "far from being spontaneous expressions of guilt, were coached, guided and cajoled in order to fit a narrative framework well rehearsed by the authorities and generally understood by the populace". It's all about the story that's told. Those accused, confined and executed were families, close friends, neighbours; whole streets were purged. When the bishop's own wealthy chancellor tried to curb his excesses, Johann



Georg pursued and killed not just him but his wife, children and servants. In the end it took Emperor Ferdinand II to bring the bishop to heel.

Many of the examples Callow describes are from the 15th to 18th centuries, with fascinating analysis of paintings and engravings by Teniers, Dürer, Salvator Rosa and others. But he goes back to the second century for the story of Lucius Apuleius, author of the irreverent religious novel *The Golden Ass*. When Apuleius married a wealthy older widow, her sons and brothers-in-law, feeling their inheritance was threatened, accused him of bewitching her. "The young philosopher was, after all, a foreigner with strange habits and interests, who kept irregular hours and refused to dress according to established custom," writes Callow; again, image is important. Apuleius defended himself successfully against all charges, ridiculing his accusers – the great irony being, he'd been studying and practising magic for years!

Coming up almost to the present, Callow spends an enjoyable chapter on Herne the Hunter, from his first mention in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' to his role in Richard 'Kip' Carpenter's much-loved TV series *Robin of Sherwood* (1984–6). Carpenter was one of the very few people to get the better of Mary Whitehouse, who had complained about the series' heavy Pagan overtones. "I'm Richard Carpenter, and I'm a professional writer," he introduced himself in a TV discussion. "And you're a professional... what?" Carpenter's earlier creation, Catweazle, Callow points out, was remarkably similar to Gerald Gardner, founder of Wicca.

Any cultural analysis is inevitably selective; Callow's selection, even when gruesome, is compelling. Above all he is a consummate storyteller, concluding that the witch is a vehicle for transformation, and her story "is not so much about the need to embrace the darkness of witchcraft, but to make the winter turn once more into spring".

David V Barrett

★★★★★

Birds can fly; we can't...

Classical literature is a rich source of bird-related *forteana*, as this superb study reveals; sadly, though, it largely omits Byzantine sources

Birds in the Ancient World

Jeremy Mynott

Oxford University Press 2018

Hb, xvii + 451pp, illus, bib, ind, £30.00, ISBN 9780198713654

This book is an extension of classicist/ornithologist Mynott's earlier *Birdscapes* (2009) and *Knowing Your Place* (2016), a Gilbert White-like description of wildlife in a Suffolk hamlet.

Despite the dense text and parenthetic opulence, it's a delightfully easy read, thanks to Mynott's stylistic panache: fluent, quasi-Herodotean, jargon-free, consistently witty.

This sumptuous volume includes lavish source translations; maps; a timeline; a list of 152 species ("only a fraction,"); illustrations; 28 pages of end-notes; a 20-page bibliography; and separate bird and general indexes. Also, a 20-page bibliography of the 152 ancient authors consulted, some Englished for the first time. Aulus Gellius is misdated; as elsewhere are Apicius and Galen. To complete the nit-picking, Apuleius *does* have an actual avian transmutation.

Despite his "rank absurdities", Aristotle ("The Master of Those Who Know", as Dante put it) dominates, billed as the founder of ornithology. The other constant companion is, logically, Aristophanes's *Birds*, whose avians specialise in, for instance, signalling men when to fuck and helping pæderasts to seduce boys.

The 19 chapters ('Soundscapes' is my favourite) include 'Birds in the natural world'; 'Birds as a resource'; 'Living with birds'; 'Invention and discovery'; 'Thinking with birds'; 'Birds as intermediaries'.

There's a special section on the apparent absence of butterflies from classical literature. Rejecting various modern suggestions, Mynott leans towards a death-connection, 'psyche' in Greek meaning both butterfly and soul.

The final sentence crystallises Mynott's message: "The birds (sc. in Aristophanes) have successfully challenged human domination, and through winged words (a Homerism) the power of imagination has transcended the limitations of human experience." Or, more simply: *Birds Can Fly, We Can't*.

Throughout, Mynott points to the debts to antiquity acknowledged by such as Darwin ("Proceeds by small steps"), Freud and Hawking.

Whilst warning against generalisations, Mynott himself makes some arresting ones. "Translation always involves interpretation" (he frequently disputes standard ones); "Folklore Dies Hard". And, a pithy reminder that the lack of competing man-made noise made the Græco-Roman world "sound very different from ours".

'Fortean' abound, especially medical ones, e.g. goose-grease heals sore bums, pigeon-shit beneficial for kidneys and liver, pelicans kill offspring then resuscitate with their own blood. (See also **FT140:18** and **370:17**.) Mynott cautions against modern mistakes that will not die and famous moments that never happened, such as Archimedes/Eureka, Newton/Apple, jettisoning the enduring belief that Spinach-iron is good for you – really, only for Popeye. He also exposes the persistent claim that Ælian (*Animals*) says kites swoop to steal human hair for

nests. Fake news! They dive to plunder meat-market stalls.

Mynott is keen to detect sexual *double entendres* in Aristophanes and company. Yet, discussing Catullus's poetic laments for his girlfriend's dead sparrow, he seems unaware of Giuseppe Giangrande's claim that the deceased avian really means 'erectile dysfunction' – a Lincolnshire woman once complained to me that "My old man's bird's dead," meaning the same.

Apart from dismissing Demetrius of Constantinople on classical falconry, which he finds "strangely absent", Mynott largely ignores Byzantine texts, which means he missed Patriarch John 'The Faster' excoriating 'Immortality with Birds', so no explanation of the erotic mechanics involved. I fancy poultry are meant. Many websites detail cases of 'Avisodomy' – my favourite headline reads: 'He Shagged Our Sunday Dinner Chicken But I Still Love Him'.

Minnesota Statute 609:294 BESTIALITY proclaims: "Whoever carnally knows a dead body or animal or bird may be sentenced to imprisonment for not more than one year or payment of a fine of not more than \$3,000 or both." A propos such fowl play, your house grammarian wonders: Did the hendiadys?

Thucydides, whom Mynott has translated, boasted his History was "a possession for all time." Same goes here. Not many writers can claim to have the last word on their subject. Mynott, though, is that – have to say it – rare bird (a classical expression). For naturalists, scientists, social historians, twitchers, this superlative study will surely fly...

Barry Baldwin

★★★★★

The Mystery of the Exploding Teeth and Other Curiosities from the History of Medicine

Thomas Morris

Bantam Press 2018

Hb, 394pp, illus, notes, ind, £14.99, ISBN9780593080320



Who could resist a contents page that blasts off with 'A fork up the anus'? (It was a novel approach to constipation.) We then move seamlessly on to a chap who got his todger stuck in a candlestick, leading to the threat of gangrene and the unfortunate attending medic being drenched with pent-up urine. And whilst on that topic, a previously healthy woman developed a condition for which her physician invented the term 'paruria erratica' ('wandering wee'). Urine was oozing from her ears, eyes, stomach and nipples. A fountain from her navel overshadowed the stream emerging from her nose. (Thomas Morris suggests the woman was a fraud; but his approach is to reproduce reports from the last 300 years verbatim, and the vast majority seem perfectly kosher though, often, stomach-turning.)

Many of the cases described will ring bells among regular readers. Could the young man who had been given a depth charge of laxatives and emetics and vomited up a foetus be a case of that old *FT* favourite, *foetus in foetu*?

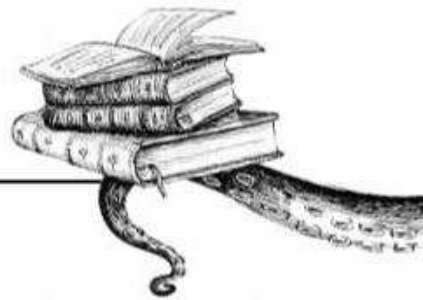
The exploding teeth of the book's title and the report like a firework when the pain eased is unexplained. And fireworks brings us back to the man who inserted one in his rectum because of dissatisfaction with his life, with fairly predictable results.

"Every one of these cases says something about the beliefs and knowledge of an earlier age," says Morris. A future history will probably be as scathing about our medical knowledge.

Perfect loo reading.

Val Stevenson

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Hidden Power

Brian Inglis

Whitecrow Books 2018
Pb, 312pp, refs, bib, ind, £12.99,
ISBN 9781786770455

This welcome reprint of Brian Inglis's 1986 critique of the uneven struggle between scientists and non-scientists over the nature and value of psychical phenomena and psychical research makes it available for a new generation of readers for whom it is more relevant than ever. Inglis was criticised by one reviewer for endorsing the "conspiracy theory" that orthodox scientists have denied and suppressed evidence of psychical phenomena, but that was precisely his topic. He wrote: "I was brought up to consider science almost a religion. Science's basic structure was presented to us as if secure for all time. We had no idea that the quantum physicists were undermining its materialist foundations. Only gradually did it dawn on those of us who began to study certain aspects of it more critically that we had been the victims of a confidence trick. We had not been taught science. We have been taught scientism." Fort hardly put it more succinctly. Inglis, his critics said, was 'untutored' in science, had misrepresented scientists' criticisms and ignored the faults of mediums and their researchers; but weren't these the very faults scientists were using against their 'enemies', he argued, not to mention using the rhetorical bludgeon of character assassination? As a historian of parapsychology and other inquiries on the fringes of science, Inglis knew well the negativity threaded through the subject's history. This putative and untamed force – psi – 'could', he suggested, explain a range of phenomena from the social behaviour of insects to telepathy and religious experiences. Yes, it was erratic, sometimes working and sometimes not, but that spoke more about our lack of appropriate means of inquiry and understanding than it did about the validity of the inquiry. Inglis was more concerned, in this easily

read book, with case studies of ethical and unethical conduct on both sides of the debate. Read here, Inglis's erudite defence of the great pioneering research into parapsychology, from Crookes to Targ and Puthoff, and from DD Home to Uri Geller.

Decoding Maori Cosmology

Laird Scranton

Inner Traditions 2018
Pb, 184pp, notes, bib, ind, \$16.99,
ISBN 9781620557051

The legend of Maori ferocity in warfare also extends to their protection of their ancestry and legends of their arrival in the New Zealand. It's a brave writer who challenges this heritage, yet Scranton isn't the only scholar to notice that "the ignorance of [the Maori] as to the origin of their principal ancestor is a very strange thing". It's as though, says Eldon Best (the country's great ethnographer, whom Scranton cites), "the ancient history of the tribe was lost in some great disaster" which left them as a band of refugees. Nevertheless, Scranton seems respectful and thoughtful as he treads carefully into a very strange territory. He has already published his theory that linguistic and cosmological elements of the cultures of the Dogon, ancient China and Egypt, the European megalith builders, and what he calls the "Sakti cultists of India" can be traced further back to the civilisation that built Gobekli Tepe in what is now Turkey around 10,000 years BC. Scranton accepts that the Maori heritage is distinctly Polynesian, but argues that the Maoris, unlike the rest of the Polynesian groups, remained relatively more isolated and for longer, thereby effectively better preserving the archaic cultural elements inherited from the primæval ancestral migrations. Fascinating in itself is his related theory that there were similarities between the pre-Celtic beliefs about the *Sidhe*, a 'fairy' race, with Maori traditions about the Peti, an ancient diminutive race of mound-building teachers. Such correspondences,

however, remain conjectural and, while exciting, his theories lack the more substantial evidence required for wider acceptance.

Military Encounters with Extraterrestrials

Frank Joseph

Inner Traditions 2018
Pb, 313pp, illus, refs, ind, \$20.00,
ISBN 9781591433248

Frank Joseph – a veteran writer, researcher and editor, in the field where ufology and forteana overlap – rushed past the evidence of UFOs and extraterrestrial contact through millennia to start his survey in the 20th century, when technology and record-keeping, especially among the military, advanced enough to delineate the true nature of the threat of alien invasion. He begins with a bang, literally: John Brandenburg's theory of a nuclear cataclysm on Mars two to three hundred million years ago, judging from the quantity of the isotope xenon 129 in that planet's atmosphere. Much here is intriguing: aerial conflicts with UFOs in both World Wars; the "US Navy's defeat in the 'Battle of Antarctica' by ET forces" in 1946; the "Battle of Los Angeles" (involving UFOs just three months after Pearl Harbor); encounters during the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Gulf and Iraq conflicts; military reports of UFOs shooting down missiles during testing and exercises. Joseph writes convincingly, supported by military documents, interviews with senior armed forces officers, government officials and military witnesses. However, when he concludes with the claims that aliens were behind the meltdown of Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant and the failure of several of Elon Musk's rockets, doubts start nagging.

Reign of the Anunnaki

Jan Erik Sigdell

Bear & Co 2018
Pb, 148pp, notes, ind, \$16.00, ISBN 9781591433033

Sigdell draws upon the same Mesopotamian mythology that powers the eternal surging of the canon-according-to-Sitchin.

While Sigdell, like Sitchin and his acolytes, admits the extraterrestrial origin of the Annunaki's progenitors, his focus is the spiritual and theological struggle that ensued when the Annunaki decided to torment their creation, we Earthlings, and this planet. Their agents, he argues, are behind every calamity and conspiracy up to and including the Illuminati and the Bilderberg Group. Like Eric Frank Russell's 'Vitons', they feed upon all our negative energy, allegedly. According to Sigdell, the "Highest God" sent Jesus to save us, but the Annunaki substituted him with a fake Jesus, thus bringing Christianity under their control. However, we might yet be saved thanks to Gnostic Christianity and the Nag Hammadi teachings. Sigdell's credentials for toppling the pillars of modern belief? Well, he has degrees in electrical and medical engineering, once worked as a regression therapist and has retired from a consultancy to the dialysis industry.

The Black Toad

Ron Wyman

Mandrake of Oxford 2018
Hb, 270pp, illus, notes, ind, £15.00,
ISBN 9781906958848

Based upon his own practice and experience of alchemical dreaming as a method of psychical and spiritual development – the Opus Magnum – Wyman takes the reader through a series of exercises and expositions. While it could be taken for a grimoire by its first appearance, it lays out a methodical process for shaping an occult practitioner's will through intentional dreaming about alchemical symbols (here chosen from Michael Maier's 17th century emblemata). Although a relatively new discipline, based upon Western occultism, it would be interesting to compare Wyman's methodology to the rigorous esoteric meditations of the Daoist immortalists, or the intense internal visualisation of Vajrayana deities practised by Tantric Buddhists. Surely his 'Philosopher's Stone' is a cousin of the formers' 'Cinnabar Pill', and of the latter's 'Wish-Fulfilling Jewel'.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

Shooting for the Moon

The director of *Whiplash* and *La La Land* delivers an unexpectedly grounded and personal account of the man at the centre of the Apollo 11 Moon landing



First Man

Dir Damien Chazelle, US 2018
On UK release from 12 October

His filmography may only contain a modest number of entries so far, but director Damien Chazelle has already made a mark on the cinematic landscape with memorable and critically acclaimed efforts such as *Whiplash* and *La La Land*. Proving, after just a few films, that he most certainly has his own, highly cinematic style, his most recent effort, *First Man*, sees the director tackling an adaptation of James R Hansen's book of the same name.

The film tells the story of astronaut Neil Armstrong's involvement in the American space programme, but also offers a look into his personal life, immediately striking a sombre tone with Ryan Gosling's subtle but intense performance. Underlining the serious tone is the pacing, which is somewhat slower than what many will associate with Chazelle's previous films. Similarly, the visual style is also starker and grittier than the choreographed colour explosion of *La La Land*, something which is further emphasised by the clever decision to use a combination of 16mm and 35mm film stock for

It conveys the uncertainty and tension of the space programme

the vast majority of the film.

As a result, it has an almost documentary-like feel at times, conveying the uncertainty and tension associated with the various stages of the space programme and the many failures that were inevitably part of it. This claustrophobic intensity pulls the viewer into the film in a manner that occasionally suggests comparisons with the almost virtual reality-like quality that was at times present in Christopher Nolan's impressive *Dunkirk*. Finally, as a necessary and impactful contrast to the grittiness and tragedy that dominates much of *First Man*, Chazelle has reserved IMAX cameras for the Moon landing sequences, ensuring that these are as breathtakingly beautiful as they should be, but never detracting from our sense of the weight of the professional failures and personal losses that came before this historic and triumphant moment.

However, the film doesn't impress as just a visual spectacle; its narrative qualities are equally noteworthy. Setting itself apart from so many previous biographical films of its ilk, *First Man* is not weighed down either by pathos or triumphalism; instead, the film not only puts its primary focus on everything that went wrong, it also ensures that it tells the story of Neil Armstrong's journey not only as an astronaut, but also as a man. Arguably, this emphasis on Armstrong leaves little time to properly flesh out most of the supporting characters, something which would have been particularly beneficial for Claire Foy's portrayal of Janet Armstrong. However, that being said, the film ultimately gives an intimate portrayal of a human life, a portrayal which is unusually realistic, even for the cinematic subgenre of the biopic.

While seemingly light years removed from Chazelle's colourful Hollywood love letter *La La Land*, the same unmistakable flair for visual storytelling he demonstrated there is notable throughout *First Man*, cementing his reputation as an impeccable cinematic craftsman. Likewise, Ryan Gosling deserves additional praise and recognition for his superb performance, which adds

new weight to those immortal words spoken by Armstrong when he first set foot on the lunar surface.

Leyla Mikkelsen



Possum

Dir Matthew Holness, UK 2018
On UK release from 26 October

Matthew Holness abandons his usual comedic territory with *Possum*, an abstract and eerily atmospheric tale about abuse and lingering emotional trauma, and a film that (fittingly) preys on the psyche of the audience.

Following the mundane daily life of disgraced and troubled puppeteer Philip (Sean Harris) after his return to his childhood home and menacing stepfather Maurice (Alun Armstrong), the film cultivates a poetic ambiguity as the mysterious narrative unfolds and Philip's demons increasingly come to haunt both Philip and the audience. Boasting an artful, brooding visual style, *Possum* creates a world equally realistic and surreal, ensuring that the audience can engage with the film's deliberate strangeness.

Carried almost solely by Harris's excellent performance, along with Armstrong's unsettling appearances throughout, Holness's film manages to create a unique slice of psychological horror that is reminiscent of the work of David Lynch without ever simply copying the American surrealist.

However, as splendidly executed as *Possum* is, some may find its climax to be somewhat awkwardly abrasive compared to the subtler tone of the rest of the film; nonetheless, it's a very worthwhile option for those who have tired of conventional horror cinema.

Leyla Mikkelsen





Climax

Dir Gaspar Noé, France 2018
On UK release

Being the latest film from the man probably responsible for more cinema walk-outs than any other director of the last 20 years (with the possible exception of Lars von Trier), Gaspar Noé. Like Von Trier, Noé is an exhibitionist, a man who has based his entire career on the desire to be noticed; and a man who will do whatever it takes to make that happen. In that sense, he is cinema's equivalent of Charlie Higson's character Colin Hunt from TV's *The Fast Show*. Only worse.

The premise of his latest film is simple: a bunch of young dancers let their hair down after an intense rehearsal, but someone has spiked the sangria with LSD, resulting in the mother of all bad trips. In practice, the film is split more or less evenly between pre- and post-acid. The first phase actually contains the film's standout moment, a quite mesmerising dance sequence set to Cerrone's classic floor-filler "Supernature". After that, there is a lengthy montage of fragmented conversations between various groups of characters, of an increasingly mean-spirited and belligerent nature. Thus the stage is set for the grand freak-out, as jealousies, desires, rivalries, fears and self-doubts rise to the surface at an alarming rate.

Noé being Noé, the film rubs your nose in all manner of dirt: murder, incest, rape, widdling on the floor, to name but a few. And, Noé being Noé, he shoots it all in the most lurid manner possible, provoking sensations of nausea and disgust familiar to all who have seen his previous films. This one is relatively mild in terms of graphic sex and violence compared to those earlier works, which may be a sign that he has mellowed somewhat. Then again, it may instead be a sign that he's losing his mojo, because the whole thing is unfocused, badly performed and pointless.

As you can no doubt tell, I disliked it intensely. Noé is a man whose work is intended to shock and disorient and upset; it's undeniable that most of his films achieve this. But to what end?

Daniel King



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

The Changeling

Dir Peter Medak, Canada 1980
Second Sight, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

Ghost stories are a natural source of fear and unsettlement; that much is obvious. But there's another element that's just as closely connected to the genre, and that's melancholy. Haunted locations have a built-in sense of loss, tragedy and sadness. Author Shirley Jackson put it best when she said that whatever walked the halls of Hill House "walked alone". Perhaps that's why *The Changeling* is a such a superb ghost movie. Yes, it's scary – at times, very – but it's got a thread of lonely sadness that elevates it from being a pure shock machine. Instead, having aged well, it has become one of the best haunted house movies ever made.

Playing against type, George C Scott is John Russell, a sensitive composer devastated by the horrific death of his wife and daughter. Better known for his grizzled portrayals of alpha males, it's an entirely different Scott we see here. It's something of a shock to watch him sobbing uncontrollably into his arm,



Haunted locations have a built-in sense of tragedy and sadness

engulfed in a grief so deep that it seems to unlock a sad, supernatural force in the attic of the Victorian mansion he has recently moved into. Pipes start hammering, pianos play on their own (a single key-stroke yields serious chills) and an intense séance scene reveals a long-forgotten ghost in the attic, desperate

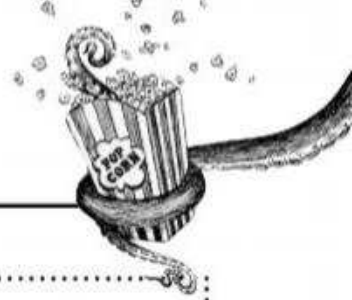
for justice.

The film is packed with frightening set-pieces, from the relentless attack of an antique wheelchair to the unforgettable dread of a child's bouncing ball. And it's got the most chilling use of EVP (electronic voice phenomena) I've ever seen in a movie. With a beautifully sad score, impressive sets and a raft of solid, grown-up performances, *The Changeling* decides to take ghosts seriously. The result is a classy, thoughtfully crafted and ultimately heartbreaking horror film that insists on something that we all know deep down: that death can't help but leave an echo.

Second Sight have given the film the respect it deserves, with this brand new 4K scan, which has a pleasing, natural look; and there's a standout extra in the shape of "The House on Cheesman Park", which tells the supposedly true story that inspired the film. Bravo, too, for including a copy of the CD soundtrack in the package: it's a truly brilliant film score.

In the end, it's possible that modern audiences might dismiss the film as clichéd, but that's only because it's been ripped off so many times since. Loved by fans and filmmakers alike (Martin Scorsese rates it as one of the scariest horror movies ever made) *The Changeling* is an essential watch for any fan of ghost stories, the paranormal, or frankly, movies in general.





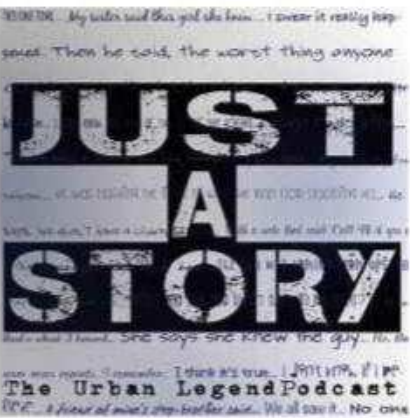
SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: Just A Story
Hosts: Samantha and Jacob LeBas
Episode Count: 120+
Format: Discussion and storytelling
Established: 2015
Frequency: Weekly
Topics: Urban legends, historical oddities, and social curiosities

After a self-admitted rough start (a newly recorded introduction apologises for the inferior audio quality of the first handful of episodes), Samantha (‘Sam’) and Jacob (‘Jake’) LeBas quickly got the hang of this podcasting thing. Their early instalments of *Just A Story*, exploring urban legends, historical oddities, and societal curiosities, are a bit unfocused and randomly discursive, but things improve quickly.

Those early shows hit all the expected urban legend subjects, from killer clowns

(Episode 2), Satanic panics (Episode 3), and the Amityville Horror (Episode 4). Their chatty approach is suitable to the stories, told in the style of friend-of-a-friend tales, and the sound quality improves from the seventh episode (it was pretty acceptable before that, though). Their aim is to study “myths and misdeeds, fears and fables” in order to discover “what they say about us as humans”. They do it in a nicely accessible way.

The over 120 episodes released over the past three years show a dramatic improvement in approach and style. They are all still available at the web site or via iTunes and can be accessed in release order or grouped through subject headers such as Crime, History, Movies, Society & Culture, Supernatural, and Classics. Those divisions indicate the spread of topics covered, with ‘Classics’ including such familiar urban legends as vanishing hitch-hikers (Episode 18), messages from the dead (Episode 75), mermaids (Episode 84), the Mandela Effect (Episode 92), alligators in the sewers (Episode 94), and alien abductions (Episode 116).

Naturally, being married, hosts Sam and Jake bring a good back-and-forth,

casual and chatty flow to the conversation as they discuss the subject under consideration. This began early with their second episode on killer clowns, which ranges across subjects such as the Joker from *Batman*, classic silent cinema clowns, the clown doll in *Poltergeist*, and the various urban legends involving clowns through to an examination of John Wayne Gacy and coulrophobia, taking in such respected American sources as NPR and the Smithsonian. They also explore their own personal reactions to clowns and those of their own children.

The ‘Supernatural’ category includes a variety of ‘usual suspects’ too, including Ouija boards (Episode 14), deals with the Devil (Episode 21), the Jersey Devil (Episode 55), Bigfoot (Episode 66), voodoo (Episode 100), dybbuk boxes (Episode 102), and tulpas (Episode 118). Under ‘Crime’, the cases Sam and Jake tackle in their discursive but informed style include serial killers, Ed Gein and *Psycho* (Episode 13), LSD, MKUltra and experiments on the US population (Episode 30), the Ted Bundy case (Episode 79), and the Zodiac Killer mystery (Episode 108).

Closer to home, the Gorbals

Vampire is the topic under discussion in Episode 43: “I Shall Become the Bat”. Sam and Jake go to the source here, hosting ‘guest storyteller’ John Lees, the Scottish comic book writer known for *And Then Emily Was Gone* and *Oxymoron*. This instalment includes an extra 10-minute talk from Lees under the title ‘You Can’t Handle the Brogue’, in reference to his Glaswegian accent, in which he explores the September 1954 tale of Glasgow’s child vampire hunters. Sam and Jake use Lee’s tale of the Gorbals Vampire to explore the wider phenomenon of vampires in ‘fact’ (through blood diseases) and fiction, from *Dracula* to *Nosferatu*. Lees also explains how the Scottish authorities decided to blame the Gorbals Vampire incident on the scapegoat of American comics – an example of a moral panic arising from a vampire myth.

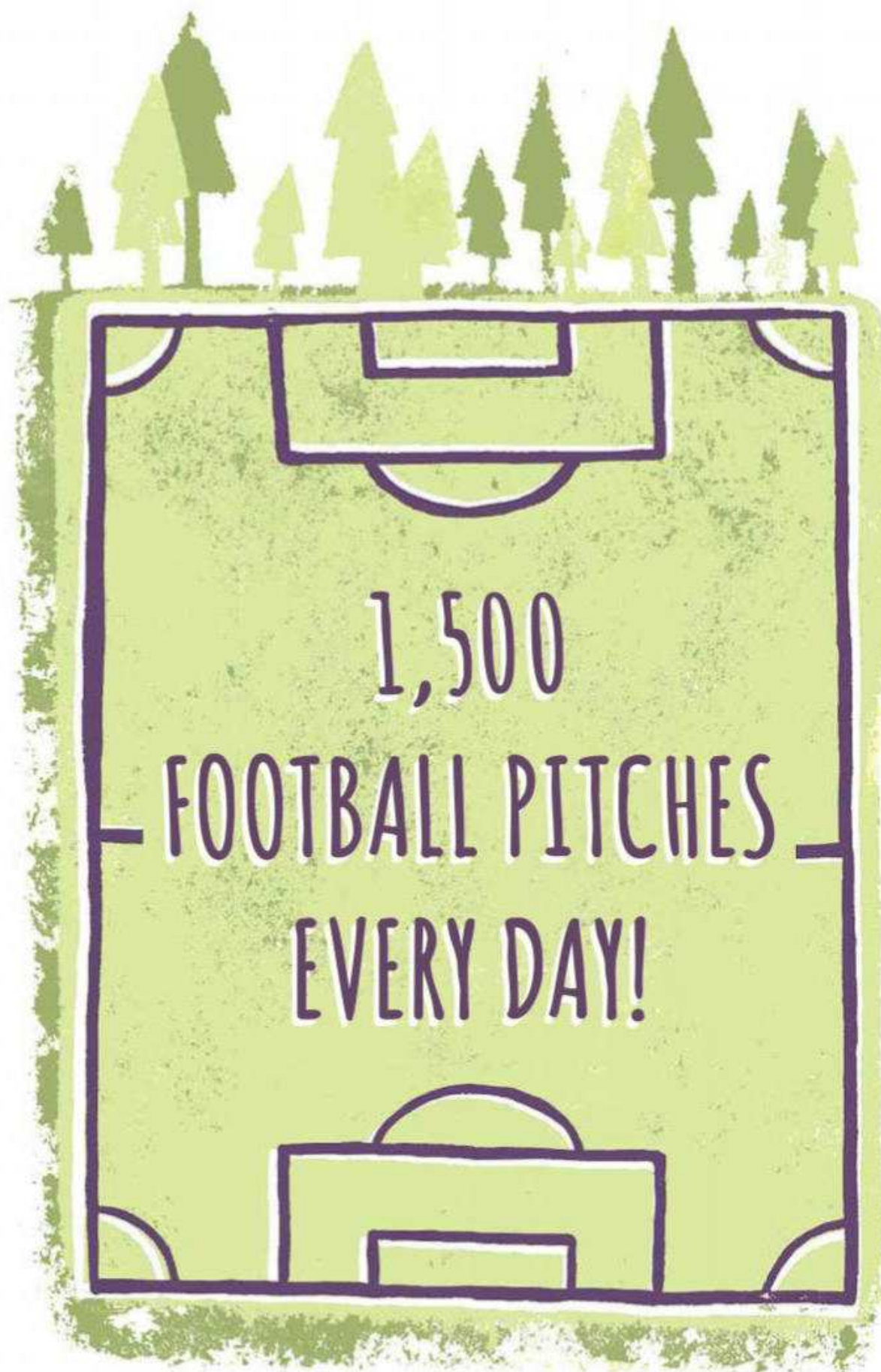
Sam illustrates many of the episodes on the website with her own ‘creepy artwork’, and the pair also produce a spin-off bi-weekly podcast called the Audio Dime Museum, a weekly serialised audio drama exploring urban legends through various artefacts in stories narrated by The Curator.

Strengths: Wide ranging topics and chatty method of presenting information.

Weaknesses: Some instalments reach over three hours in length!

Recommended Episodes: Ep 22: Nazis, I Hate Those Guys; Ep 56: Snuff Films Do Not Exist; Ep 69: Splendid Little Wars – False Flags; Ep 70: The Enemy Within – Conspiracy Theory 101.

Verdict: Improved from tentative beginnings, *Just A Story* has proved to be an entertaining and informative discussion of all sorts of urban legends between two hosts who boast a natural connection.



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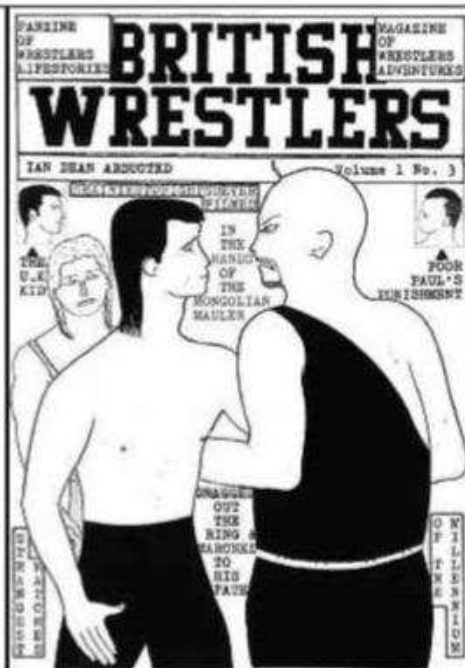
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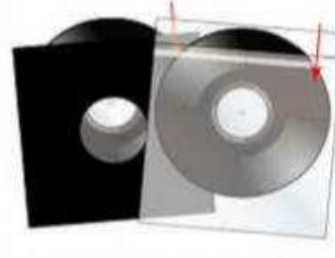
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Kent predator

Following on from the reports of Alien Big Cats in the UK [FT369:10-11], last year on Romney Marsh in Kent there was a spate of killings of sheep by what was described by the local press as a type of ‘big cat type creature’. This was confirmed by the nearby Port Lympne wildlife park in nearby Hythe, as plaster casts of paw prints taken at the scene were confirmed as belonging to either a puma or a lynx. The local authorities initially blamed a fox, but there is obviously no way that a fox could tear an adult sheep in half. Is the Ministry of Agriculture trying to avoid paying out compensation to farmers who have lost livestock, by refusing to acknowledge the existence of such animals in the UK?

Phil Brand
London

Witches’ property seized

In response to the letter from James Wilkins on property being seized during the witchcraft trials [FT369:74], I can add that yes, it does seem so. I have a 1984 copy of Rossell Hope Robbins’s excellent treatise on the subject, *The Encyclopedia of Demonology & Witchcraft*, first published in 1959. It documents various instances of the seizure of houses, land and property throughout the persecution years – predominantly Europe in 16th and 17th centuries – usually, but not wholly, by jealous rivals across a broad spectrum of society. And the awful Catch-22 of the time: if one was to support anyone accused of witchcraft, then that person was also deemed to be in league with the accused.

Mike Bridgeman
By email

Aboriginal floaters

With regard to Leslie Vinson’s optical phenomena [FT369:76], in my experience psychiatrists love to scaremonger to keep in with their friends in the pharmaceuticals industry. I think he’s just caught sight of some ‘floaters’ in his vitreous humour, and then rationalised them as looking like Aboriginal

SIMULACRA CORNER



Beach puffin

Kirsty Morrison found this “puffin rock” on a beach in Shetland and commented: “It was at the end of August so all the real puffins were out at sea after raising their chicks”.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

cave painting figures.

● I would like to big it up for Rameshchandra Fefar [FT369:22]; it’s hard to admit you hate your job, and claiming divine intervention is as good a way to get yourself fired as any.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Sunlight backscatter

Jenni Kemp’s pink moon-shaped UFOs [FT369:76] reminded me of two things: an LP by Nick Drake, and the Gegenschein, a disc in the night sky around the antisolar point, caused by backscatter of sunlight by interplanetary dust. The Gegenschein, however, is very faint and easily obscured by light pollution. But was the antisolar point involved in some way? And

were solar flares happening at the time?

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Actor identified

Regarding the photograph of three people sent in by Ross Smith [FT369:75]: The person on the right is a young Bryan Forbes (1926-2013), the celebrated English actor and producer. He made a number of films through the 1950s and the photo is possibly a press call about one of the films.

Percy Aggett
By email

Rocky portrait

I thought right away that the photo of a cliff face in the recent Simulacra Corner [FT367:73] was

the profile of Shawn MacGowan of the Pogues. Exact.

Ken Butters
By email

Revd Donald Ormand

Since Alan Murdie failed to mention this in his fascinating “Ghostly Mists and Fogs” [FT368:14-16], I must: the man who exorcised the stretch of A35 at Ballair, Revd Donald Ormand, also exorcised Loch Ness on Saturday 2 June 1973. Ted Holiday was a witness to this event, and in the days afterward reported poltergeist-like activity and other weirdness. This is described in the book he wrote with Colin Wilson, *Goblin Universe*.

Jim Edenbaum
By email

Astronaut genes

The report concerning the effects of 340 days in space on astronaut Scott Kelly [FT368:21] says “seven per cent of his genes didn’t match those of his [Earth-bound identical twin] brother.” This conjures up images of Scott’s genes mutating in sync with each other throughout all the cells in his body, turning him into someone – or something – else. (For comparison, bear in mind that humans and chimpanzees are genetically 95 to 99 per cent the same.)

While this happens all the time in comic books and science fiction movies, it did not happen in real life: Scott and brother Mark are still identical twins. Scott did show differences in levels of gene expression, the way genes do their job by producing proteins and other molecules. While changes in expression due to stress and environmental factors are not unusual, the scientists were a bit surprised that the changes in seven per cent of his genes lasted so long. To confuse the issue slightly, Scott did experience some random spontaneous gene mutations on a very small scale – as we all do over time – and unsurprisingly it was more mutations than experienced by his twin, given the greater exposure to cosmic rays.

Bill Polaski
Mineola, New York

LETTERS

Long-stay patients

Rob Gandy's letter about a lady who had been in hospital for 70 years in 1981 [FT369:75] reminded me of a sad story which came out around that time, related in a Pelican Special (paperback) on civil liberties. Many young girls were attracted to soldiers (as they always have been!) in 1914-18 and of course there were far more than usual about in those years. Some parents took the extreme step of getting wayward daughters certified and put in mental homes. All it took was for two doctors to sign a certificate and the girl might be locked away for ever. There were quite a few of these girls and the author described it as a "Kafkaesque" scandal.

George Featherston
Redcar, Cleveland

Collapse dynamics

I don't wish to continue an endless debate about 9/11 in these pages, but would like to point out some oversights and errors in Noel Rooney's response to my letter about 9/11 [FT365:74-75]: the top speed of a Boeing 707 is in fact faster than a Boeing 767 (545kts vs 485kts top speed), but this is immaterial since the speed at the altitude the planes hit the towers is not dictated by the top speed of the aircraft and in fact the reported speeds that the aircraft hit the towers simply raises more questions as a 767 flying at the speeds reported (510kts for flight 175 and 430kts for flight 11) at that altitude would have likely destroyed at least flight 175 before it even got to the tower and flight 11 was



A curious cow

This cow lives on a farm in the Peak District near the Minning Low burial site. Curiously, the farm is adjacent to the site of the Why Not? music festival, which uses a question mark in its branding.

Jon Garth, *Wirksworth, Derbyshire*

also 70kts over the operational limit at that altitude (360kts) (even if WTC 1 & 2 were designed to withstand a 707 hitting it at 520 kt according to design tests at the time).

As for Rooney's assertion that "fuel load was not incorporated into the design parameters": this goes against what lead structural engineer John Skilling said when interviewed in the *Seattle Times* in 1993: "We looked at every possible thing we could think of that could happen to the buildings, even to the extent of an airplane hitting the side... Our analysis indicated the biggest problem would be the fact that all the fuel [from the airplane] would dump into the building. There would be

a horrendous fire. A lot of people would be killed. The building structure would still be there." Why would engineers designing a building to withstand an impact of a plane not take into account the fuel? It

seems like a massive oversight.

One of the first things we learn at school in physics is that for every action there is a reaction. Even if "the top 10 storeys or so would fall onto the floors below, which were not designed to withstand that much weight" the lower parts of the building would offer resistance either deflecting the top of the building to one side (the path of least resistance) or at the very least crushing upwards with the same force the top part crushes downwards (perhaps more as the lower structure became increasingly dense towards the lower part of the building). There is simply not a mechanism in physics as we understand it that would allow the 10 top floors to crush the remaining 95 or so floors at a rate just slower than freefall acceleration without the use of explosives and certainly not to do it twice. The fact that the buildings fell slightly slower than free fall does not somehow wave away the fact that the buildings, all three of them, fell suspiciously fast; and he is wrong about consensus, at least in WTC 7 where the latest NIST report does in fact concede that at least part of WTC 7's collapse was at freefall accelera-

tion (making me conclude that Rooney either hasn't read the latest NIST report or missed that detail).

Finally the assertion that WTC 1 & 2 fell straight down because they were "mostly empty space" doesn't take into account the massive core structure central to WTC 1 & 2, 47 steel beams which took up a sizable part of the floor plan (we'll forget the outer structure for now), apparently simply buckled and folded at close to freefall acceleration offering almost no resistance. Rooney didn't answer any of my questions and in fact only raised more. I don't wish to continue this discussion here as there are simply too many points to discuss but it is a subject that should interest all fortians because there are so many questions and the more you look the more unanswered questions you find. It is also fascinating from a sociological perspective.

As for Robin Ramsay's idea that the buildings were rigged with explosives on the off-chance that they needed to be destroyed at a moment's notice, that, like many 'rationalisations', sounds a lot more far-fetched than the idea that it was planned by those who not only had the means to do it but who profited, and continue to do so, from the outcome.

Matt Elliott

Nancy, France

[Editor's note: this correspondence thread is now closed]

Tulpa probability

Graeme Kenna's letter "Poet's Corner" [FT368:77] offers a good opportunity for some speculative calculations of probability. While discussing a person he hadn't seen for 20 years, suddenly that person is found not only to be in the room but also has overheard the conversation (and has been looking for Mr Kenna – though not with any great gusto, one gathers – to give him a two-decade-old cheque).

A third party suggests that they are "Tulpas, called into being by each other's thoughts". Well, probability says no – a similar thing happened to me and I also immediately thought that





mystical forces must be at work. I'd been idly walking towards an intersection and was surprised to see an old mate, David, who I hadn't seen for years, waiting 30m (90ft) away at the traffic lights opposite. I must have momentarily looked away because when I was about to give him a hoiy, it was obvious that the person looked absolutely nothing like David.

Worried about galloping senility, I walked around the corner of the intersection and (you've guessed it) there was David 30m away, walking towards me. As I've said, one's initial instinct is to attribute this sort of "one-in-a-million" coincidence to the supernatural – but think about that "one-in-a-million" expression: in Australia alone, it would mean that it happens to about two people every three weeks. When you factor-in other variables such as how often we think we recognise someone and it's not them; or how often we bump into people we haven't seen for ages, these aspects of "frequency" of incidence increase the probability of all of it happening at once to, at the very least, one person, somewhere, every day.

Mr Kenna's experience can be similarly put on a scale of probability beginning with the act of discussing someone thought to be absent but who is in the same room – luckily he was being complimentary because it is a frequent enough anecdote to strike a red-faced chord with most readers. I'll leave the rest of what I've called the far from exact "speculative" calculations of probability to better mathematical minds, but I'd suggest that you have a good chance of having it happen to you; such a good chance that, if it doesn't, you're just unlucky.

● The Sideline "Right Guard" [FT370:12] reported a Stockholm University discovery of a "correlation between holding strong right-wing views and a fear of infectious diseases or concerns about hygiene." That probably describes me, except the bit about being "right-wing" but I'll not take offence; what would we call the two latter "fears and concerns" other than completely sensible anyway? I'd be more aghast at the research

were I a member of the radical Left which, by extrapolation, must thereby be composed of largely unwashed, insanitary individuals who have a penchant for catching and spreading whatever plague is currently doing the rounds.

Robert T Walker

Wagga Wagga, New South Wales

Nixon/Gleason event

It's easy to understand why people want to believe that Richard Nixon showed Jackie Gleason a cache of dead aliens. It's got everything – unseen power, government conspiracy, and the idea that celebrities somehow are privy to things the rest of us are not. But, as Brian J Robb pointed out in "The Entertainer, the President, and the Aliens" [FT366:30-36], it just doesn't seem to hold water – it first appeared in the *National Enquirer*, after all.

However, since I first came across the story years ago (in a book somewhere, or a UFO programme), I've been fascinated by it. So many people believe such an outlandish tale that seems to have no hint of plausibility. Or does it? I've wracked my brain, and I think I've figured out how the tale could, in fact, be plausible. It involves a few facts and a few 'well-known' UFO related stories from past decades.

First of all, a fact: Richard Nixon served as Vice President during the Eisenhower administration. During this time, the initial UFO mania was at its height, Project Blue Book was a big deal, and so on. At such an early period of the phenomenon, it would stand to reason that Nixon would be privy to any briefings that were given to President Eisenhower. Nixon would be in the loop regarding UFOs, crashes, bodies, and so on. Second, a conjecture: assuming Nixon was privy to top secret UFO knowledge, it stands to reason that he would continue to be briefed once he became President in 1969. For the sake of argument, we'll take it as given that Kennedy and Johnson were similarly briefed.

So, if we can accept these things as possibly true, what makes it possible that Nixon showed Gleason some bodies



Brocken spectre

I was lucky enough to experience a 'Brocken Spectre' at Sand Bay, Weston-super-Mare recently. It was from cliffs looking down onto sea mist. The picture doesn't do it justice, but my head's shadow had a rainbow ring around it and I felt like a saint! It did feel quite strange, as if just for that moment the Universe was showing me something that I had no hope of understanding beyond mere emotion.

Bert Gray-Malkin, Bristol

in the dead of night? A couple of things: first, the power of the presidency. As a veteran, I can assure you that, if the President had turned up at my post, I would have done exactly as I was told. Second, Nixon's predilection for trying to shake his security detail. This would also indicate some freedom of movement for Nixon that wouldn't be possible in this day and age.

All of this is rehash, but if we take one more well-known but unsubstantiated UFO story into account, then some puzzle pieces fit together. Early in his presidency, Jimmy Carter supposedly called then-CIA director George HW Bush to the Oval Office to demand information on UFOs. Bush apparently stated: "Mr. President, that information is on a need-to-know basis, and Mr President – you don't need to

know."

So how does this fit? One could logically theorise that, after the intelligence community found out about the Nixonian breach of security, it pushed everything involving UFOs and EBEs much deeper under the rug, resulting in a de facto split between elected government and the intelligence community, our "shadow government". The intelligence community would have come to the conclusion that "Presidents can no longer be trusted with the most sensitive information."

Therefore, if we weave our narratives carefully, the Nixon/Gleason moment fits neatly into the tapestry of conspiracy that has come to define certain parts of the UFO community over the past 50 years.

Timothy Young

Saratoga, Wyoming

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteanimes.com

Is the Bogle back?

We moved in to our current property in October 2007. It is a fairly typical four-bedroom detached house on a housing estate in the village of Cotgrave, nine miles south east of Nottingham city centre. The property had been occupied by the first occupants since it was built in 1982; however, they bought a bungalow elsewhere in the village in which they were living and the property had been unoccupied for about a year. In we moved, my wife, our three teenage children, two Labradors, and two cats. Years passed and apart from the odd feeling of being watched and our male Labrador hiding at the back of the cupboard under the stairs for no apparent reason, everything seemed fine.

Our eldest daughter's bedroom was/is on the ground floor in what had been the integral garage (the previous owners had built a large garage/workshop and utility room on the side of the house). The younger two children had their own bedrooms on the first floor, along with my wife and me. After some time in the 'new' house, my eldest daughter would ask me to tell the other two to stop running up and down the landing in the middle of the night, as they were waking her up. On quizzing my other daughter and son about this, they flatly denied doing so. Neither my wife nor myself ever heard anything. This happened a few times over the months and years, but the other two children always flatly denied running about in the middle of the night.

Then one night I woke up around 3am and heard a sort of running/scampering sound on the landing. I got up quietly to try and catch whichever of my younger two were mucking about outside my bedroom. I flung our door open and switched on our bedroom light to find... nothing. I checked the other two bedrooms and there were the kids sound asleep in their beds. I went downstairs and found

nothing unusual.

I heard this running sound fairly regularly after that – always on the landing in the middle of the night. Nothing ever there, but my eldest daughter would confirm some nights she had heard it as well. The footsteps were odd in that they sounded like those of a toddler just learning to walk with their stiff legs and slightly forward leaning posture, as if their legs were trying to catch up with their bodies. The other odd thing I noticed was that I could hear the running on carpet far clearer than if doing so myself in shoes. Whoever/whatever was doing it seemed to be small but dense in weight.

By now, we had added a Jack Russell to our menagerie and she would often sleep on top of our duvet, or more likely under it when it was cold. One night I was woken with Ruby sitting on my chest and growling fiercely towards the bottom of the bed or bedroom door. I flicked my bedside light on and guess what? ...nothing. She didn't seem too bothered about investigating whatever had been there, but stayed by my side facing towards the door, which for a Jack Russell is telling in itself.

Then one night, about four years ago now, I woke at around 3am again, but this time felt as though something was in our bedroom watching me. I could hardly breathe and lay still, listening intently for the faintest sound. Nothing faint about it. A massive BANG on the stairs, followed by another, followed by a third and last one further down. I could feel the vibration of each bang through the mattress of our bed. Bravely, I stayed in bed awake all night. No other sounds, no dogs barking. They were probably terrified like me. That was the end of the running about at night. I got the distinct feeling 'the Bogle' as we had started calling it, had said 'Goodbye'. My eldest daughter had heard the three massive bangs descending the stairs as well. Neither my wife or other two children heard anything;

indeed, my wife has never heard anything unusual in the house at all.

A couple of weeks ago, I found one of my recently purchased aquatic frogs on a mat near the rear patio door. Dried out and perfectly intact, but nearly 10m (33ft) from the fish tank. These frogs aren't amphibious, but breathe water only, like fish. Later that day, bizarrely, we found one of our small fish dried out and on the settee in the living room. Then this morning, about 3am, I heard what I thought was our Labrador turning around outside our bedroom door. He'll come up if the living room door isn't shut properly and sleep on the landing outside our door. I warned my wife not to trip over him when she got up this morning, but he wasn't there and the living room door was firmly shut, with one Labrador and one Jack Russell waiting on the other side.

Is the Bogle back?

Tony Shreeve
Cotgrave, Nottinghamshire

A fearful patch

I was born in 1956 and bought up on a council estate in Rhyd-y-Fro, South Wales, about a mile up a steep hill from Pontardawe. The estate was quite small and at the end of our road were fields and woods. As with most kids in the 1960s, I spent most of my free hours out of doors; if I stayed in, my mother would find me things to do. There was a huge field about a quarter of a mile away, with tough grass, reeds and scrub, which made an ideal playground. Sometime in the winter of 1966 or thereabouts I came upon one area that made me feel uneasy. It gave me a feeling of foreboding, cut off from all that was around me. I have no idea why.

In May 1973 I was swotting for my 'O' Levels. As a break from revision I took next door's dog for a walk, up though the local woods and back down

through the rough field. As we got close to the area that had troubled me in the 1960s, the dog started to growl and the hackles on her neck stood up. She was a Jack Russell Terrier and was normally scared of nothing, but there was no way she was going through this patch. We skirted around it at a distance, with her glancing nervously in all directions. I got a feel of how close she would go, which was about 20 yards. This was odd and a bit unnerving, but I soon forgot about it.

Then early one Sunday morning in January 1978, I picked up my brother's Labrador Ben, a gun dog, and with my shotgun we went off in search of rabbits or maybe a hare over the mountain. Ben was exuberant, running all over the place and no use as a gun dog, so I walked him around the perimeter of the rough field to get some of the bounce out of him. We were headed for the unnerving patch of ground, but now I was 21, and with shotgun over my arm I strode towards it. Ben came haring past me like a bullet, but then his paws went rigid and he slid on his backside for a few feet before coming to a whimpering halt before the patch. He retreated behind my legs and didn't reappear until we were well past.

I never went back after that. Google Maps shows that the area is now built over.

Stuart Martinson
Pontardawe, Swansea

Plasma balls

I read the ball lightning accounts of Nicola Maasdam and John Hope with great interest [FT354:73]. This was because of personal and familial experiences with the phenomenon.

When I was a child I would regularly accompany my Mom to visit my Nan in Derry Street, Blakenhall, Wolverhampton. The house she lived in was an old terraced two-up-two-down, with a communal yard to the rear. I was

always perplexed that whenever there was a thunderstorm my Nan would insist on the back door from the kitchen being kept wide open, even though heavy rain falling into the yard would splash inside the doorway. Eventually I asked why she did this and was told that, many years before, she had been sitting in the kitchen during a thunderstorm when ball lightning came down the chimney into the room. The sparking ball quickly circled three or four times around the dining table, which was in the centre of the kitchen. Naturally frightened by this, my Nan leapt up and opened the back door. The ball lightning then shot out of the back door and exploded in the yard. I presume that she thought that ball lightning *might* strike twice and therefore always kept the back door open.

I personally saw ball lightning when I was around 10 years old in the early 1960s. I lived on the middle floor of a three-storey block of flats on the south-western edge of Wolverhampton. This was great for storm-watching because you could clearly see them rolling in across the Shropshire plain, past the Wrekin. I loved to do this from our balcony, which was sheltered from the elements by the balcony above.

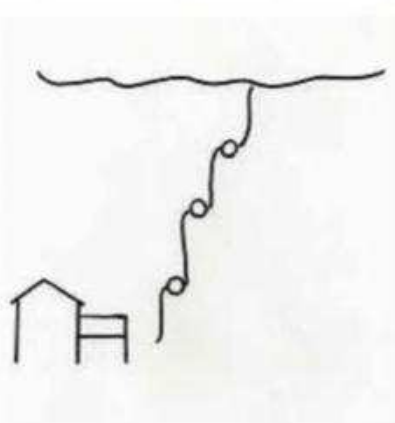
One night I was watching a storm with my cousin Lesley; the clouds were low and the storm was all around us. We then both saw a big silvery ball of lightning appear out of a cloud to our left and descend to the ground to near a house that was over 500m (1.640ft) away, on Drive Fields. At that distance, the ball lightning must have been very large – my guess is much bigger than a beach ball – but what struck me most was that it fell to the ground something like a leaf falls to the ground (see drawing for rough representation). It only took a few seconds, but the image has remained in my mind ever since.

Rob Gandy
Wirral, Merseyside

I walked into my bedroom where my black Burmese cat Spock (see **FT355:76**) was sitting on the bed. The room was in a bit of a jumble and in one corner near the window there were piles of videotapes, a whole bunch of guitars and an old valve guitar amplifier – the now legendary

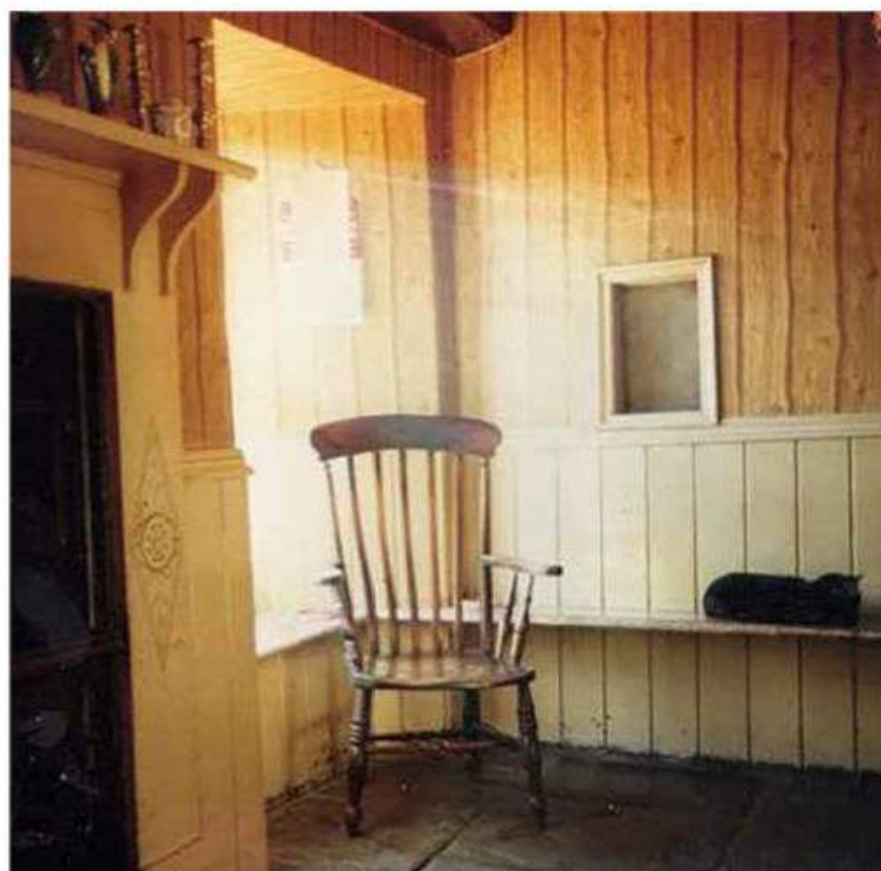


TOP: The Radnor Arms 1982. The window the ball lightning passed through is immediately under the pub sign. **RIGHT:** Interior of the Radnor Arms. The window behind the chair is where the ball lightning is said to have passed through. The pub is now a house but the old black grate is still there. **BELOW:** Rob Gandy's falling plasma ball.



Vox AC30 – on top of which were a whole stack of papers and various odds and ends. I was talking to the cat when I noticed that he was staring intently in the direction of the Vox amplifier. As I turned to follow his gaze, several of the papers fell from the top of the amplifier and for a brief moment I was aware of a grapefruit-sized ball of plasma hovering a few inches above the amplifier and moving from right to left before vanishing. My immediate reaction was that my imagination was playing tricks, but the disturbance of the papers falling and Spock's own transfixion convinced me that we had both seen something real.

I often wondered if somehow the ball of plasma was attracted



to – or was even the product of – the valve amplifier. I had been told by its previous owner that someone had once modified it with a “potentially fatal” home-made echo device, so it had been amateurishly tinkered with in its time, but I really don't know enough about electronics to comment further. Unfortunately, I don't remember the atmospheric conditions, which could have been pertinent, and I am uncertain about the date, but it was either the late 1990s or the early 2000s.

Gavin Lloyd Wilson
Glandwr, Pembrokeshire

I used to frequent the Radnor Arms in Talgarth, Powys, owned

by Mr and Mrs James. Jim or ‘Jammy’ the landlord was a nice old chap and his regulars were real characters all now passed on, including Mr and Mrs James. Jim told me that one very hot day he had left open the back door to the bar room, which opened onto a large yard. There was a lightning strike in the yard and a small fireball came into the bar. Everyone watched as it drifted towards the old fireplace, then headed for the adjacent window and passed through into the road beyond. I don't know whether it went through an open window or just passed through the glass.

Roderick Williams
By email

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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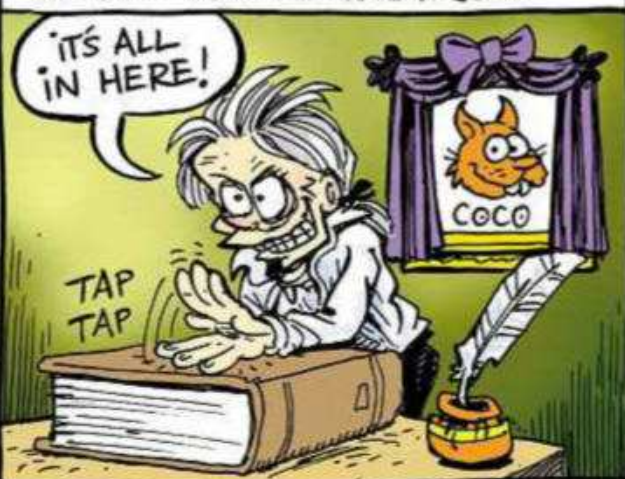
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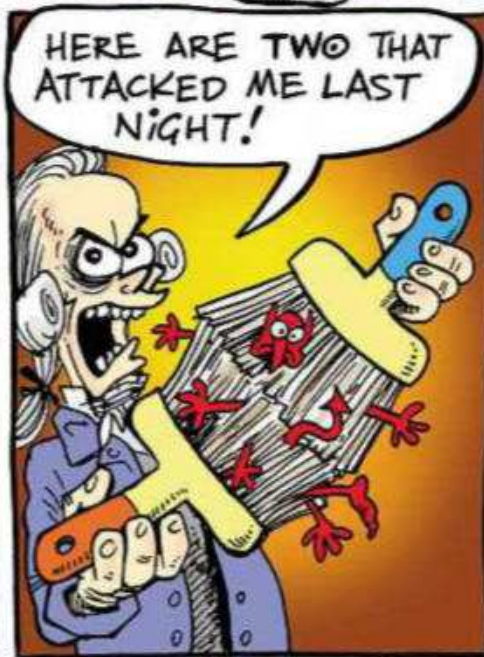
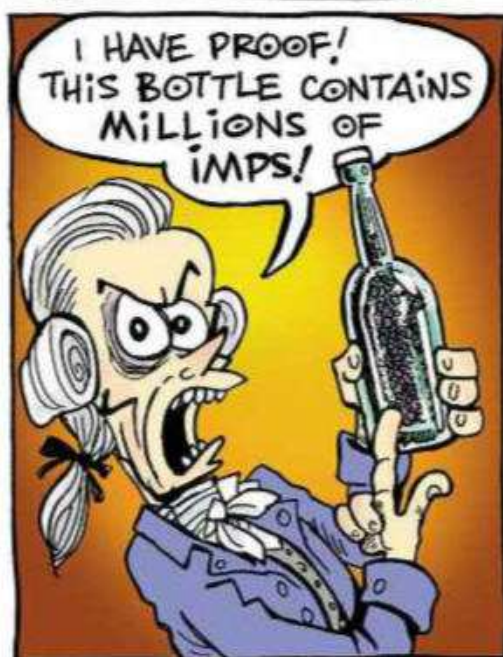
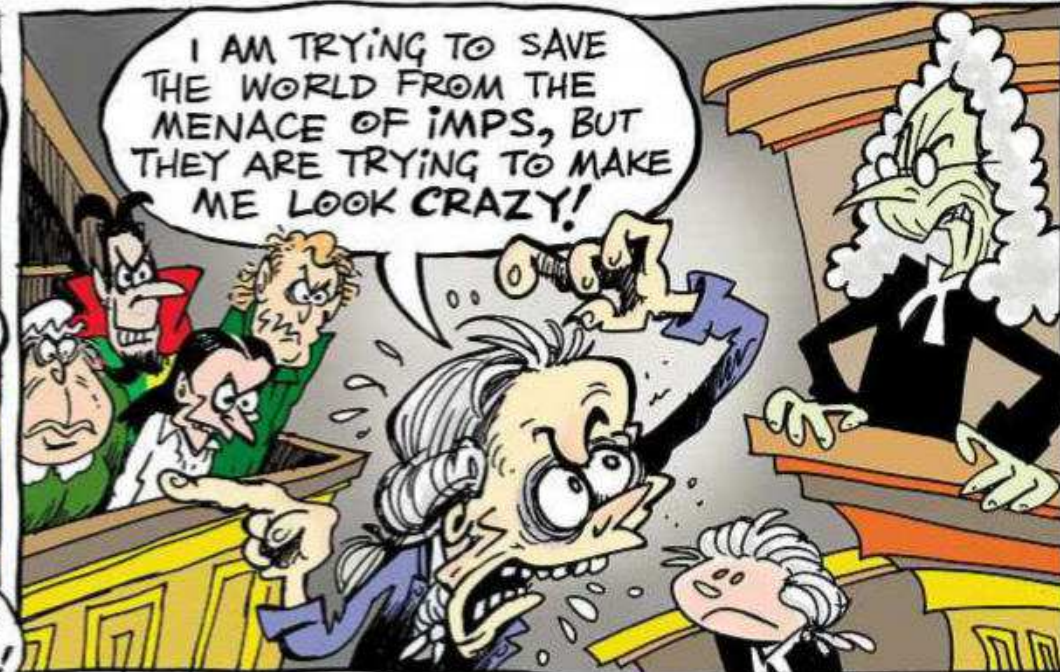
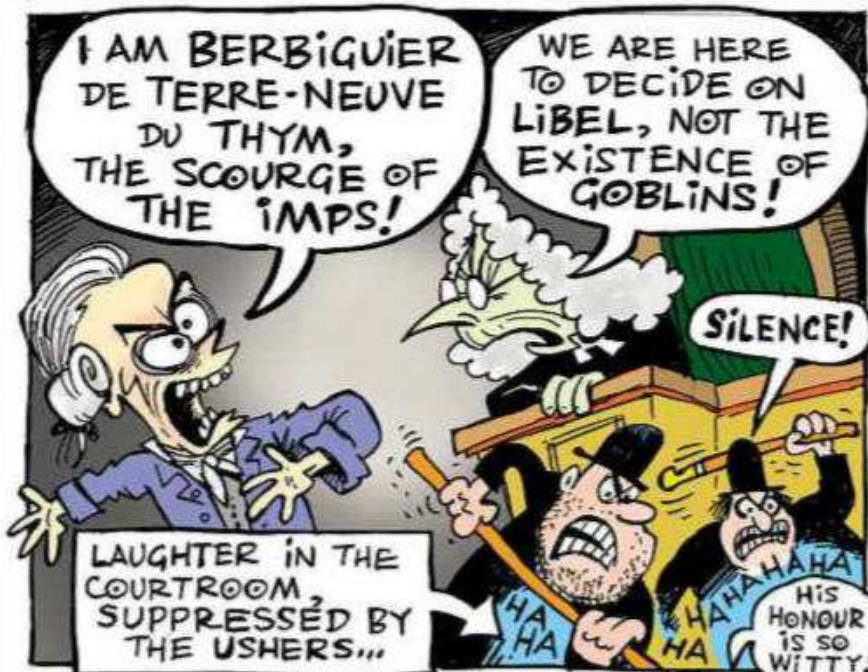
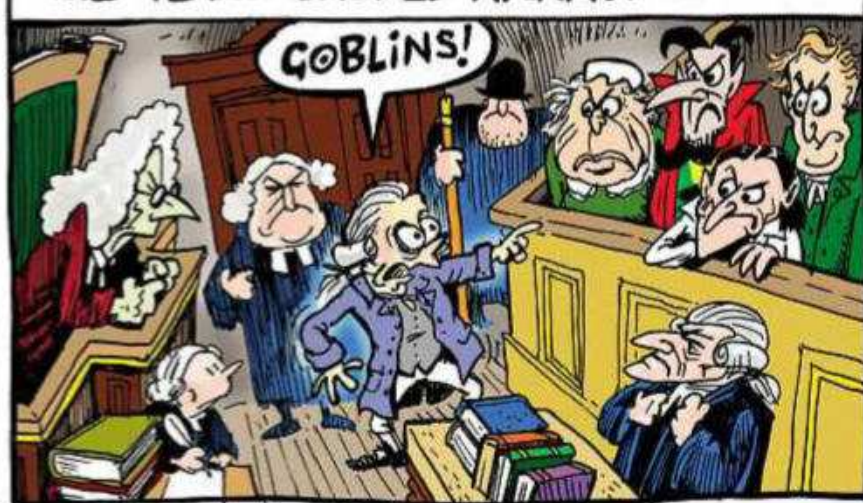
BERBIGUIER Part 4 HUNT EMERSON & BOB RICKARD

AS PART OF HIS RECOVERY FROM THE DEATH OF COCO, HIS SQUIRREL, BERBIGUIER WROTE HIS MEMOIRS...



IN 1827, ROBERT ARNAUD, EDITOR OF THE FAMOUS "BIOGRAPHIE DES CONTEMPORAINS" REVIEWED BERBIGUIER, AND CALLED OUR AUTHOR "A MADMAN." BERBIGUIER WAS FURIOUS, AND SUED!

UNFORTUNATELY FOR HIM, MANY OF THE PEOPLE HE'D CALLED GOBLINS OVER THE YEARS BACKED ARNAUD...



BERBIGUIER LOST THE CASE, WITH DAMAGES! RESENTING HIS NEW-FOUND FAME AS A "LITERARY FOOL," HE SKULKED AROUND PARIS BUYING BACK AND DESTROYING COPIES OF HIS BOOKS...



IN 1841 HE DIED, UNREPENTANT AND BROKE! OR WAS IT 1833? OR MAYBE 1836? '51? '57? THE DATE IS UNCERTAIN BECAUSE THE IMPS STILL HAD IT IN FOR HIM!

IT WAS RUMOURED THAT, AT HIS OWN REQUEST, HIS SHROUD WAS FILLED WITH NEEDLES!



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FORTEAN TIMES 373

ON SALE 8 NOV 2018

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On 5 August, staff at Sarabeth's Restaurant in New York (on Amsterdam Avenue at West 80th St) opened their walk-in freezer to be confronted by a man who picked up a kitchen knife and yelled "Away Satan!" before attacking employees, who were able to disarm him and wrestle him to the ground. He lost consciousness and was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The kitchen staff did not recognise the 54-year-old man, or know how he had got into the freezer. His was not named in news reports. *[CBS, New York] 5 Aug 2018.*

Last January, wealthy Alan Jay Abrahamson, 71, was found in a field in West Palm Beach, Florida, with a bullet hole in his heart. No sign of a gun or shell casing, but there was a thin trail of blood on the front of his jacket, as if a bloody string had been dragged across his body. An examination of his home computer showed that in a voice search in July 2017 he asked: "Can life assurance companies deny payment for suicide?" – and that he had purchased a weather balloon on Christmas Day. Police initially treated the case as one of murder, but after several months twigged that they were dealing with a real-life copy of a storyline from the television crime drama *CSI Las Vegas*. In a 2003 episode, a man fakes his own murder so his family can collect on his life insurance. He goes outside and shoots himself dead with a gun he'd tied to a large helium balloon – leaving behind a corpse, but no gun. Abrahamson, who left behind a widow, had made large payments into his life-insurance account before his death. Police believe that an offshore wind probably carried the gun to at least 95,000ft (29,000m) before it burst "somewhere north of the Bahamas in the Atlantic Ocean".

The same *CSI* episode had inspired another real-life attempt to make a suicide look like a murder: in 2008 a man from New Mexico was found dead with a gunshot wound to the back of the head. Balloons snagged on a cactus nearby had a gun tied to ribbons hanging beneath them. *nypost.com, 14 July; D.Mail, 15 July 2018.*

A South Korean woman in her 40s, who was meant to be sleeping in a coffin as part of a ritual intended to rid her of bad spirits and bring her good fortune, suffocated inside the sealed casket. Three women got into coffins on 2 August in an apartment in the city of Gumi. The two survivors said the woman who died tried to get out of her coffin after about two hours,

complaining that she couldn't breathe and that it was too hot. She was persuaded to carry on with the rite by her friends, who told her to endure the discomfort. *D.Telegraph, 7 Aug 2018.*

Erik Larsen Fjordvald, 61, was taking part in a motorbike rally in Thy, Denmark, on 10 August when he was hit in the throat by a metal tent peg propelled by high winds during a storm. He died two days later without regaining consciousness. *D.Telegraph, 14 Aug 2018.*

Egidius Schiffer, 62, the "Aachen Strangler" who had murdered five female hitchhikers, accidentally killed himself in his cell on 27 July. He gave himself a fatal electric shock after tying a cable from a lamp around his penis and nipples. He was still tied up when guards at Bochum prison, North Rhine-Westphalia, opened his cell. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 28 July 2018.*

A 60-year-old man in Istra, near Moscow, died after slipping in his bathroom and falling on to the handle of a lavatory brush, which pierced his right eye socket and jammed into his skull. Surgeons cut off the handle near his face, and removed a small piece of skull in order to extract the rest of the brush. However, the man did not regain consciousness and died several days later. In 2009, a woman from Lincolnshire died from blood loss during an operation to remove part of a lavatory brush handle that had lodged in her buttock after a drunken fall in a friend's bathroom. *Times, Metro, 2 Aug 2018.*

Two people were killed in separate hippopotamus attacks in Kenya on 11 August. While attempting to photograph a hippo at a wildlife resort on Lake Naivasha, 56 miles (90km) north-west of Nairobi, Chang Ming Chuang, 66, a Chinese tourist, got too close to the animal, which fatally bit him on the chest. Another Chinese tourist was injured in the incident. Hours earlier, a local fisherman was also mauled and killed by a hippo only a few miles away. It is thought high water levels and rains had forced the animals inland. Hippos kill an estimated 500 people every year in Africa. *theweek.co.uk, 13 Aug 2018.*

Desiree Pell, 78, was stung on the finger by a wasp as she peered into a barrel in her garden, which she thought contained a nest. The mother of four, of Ruskington, Lincolnshire, collapsed and died from an allergic reaction. *Sun, 30 Mar 2018.*

Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



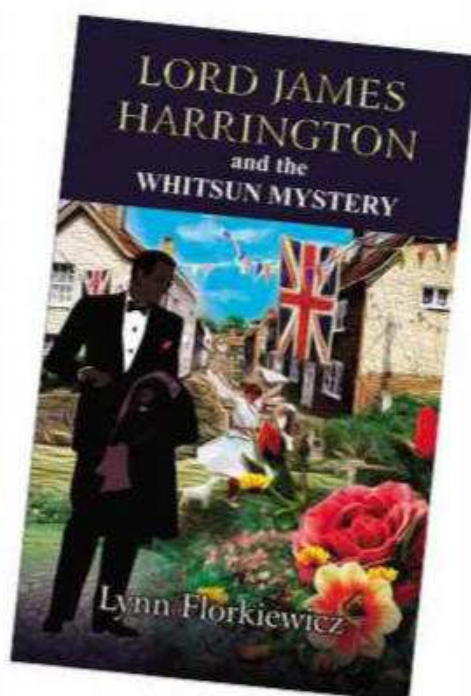
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on eight book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a ninth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well as from Lord Harrington's very own

website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call - 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT18 You'll be glad you did!

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